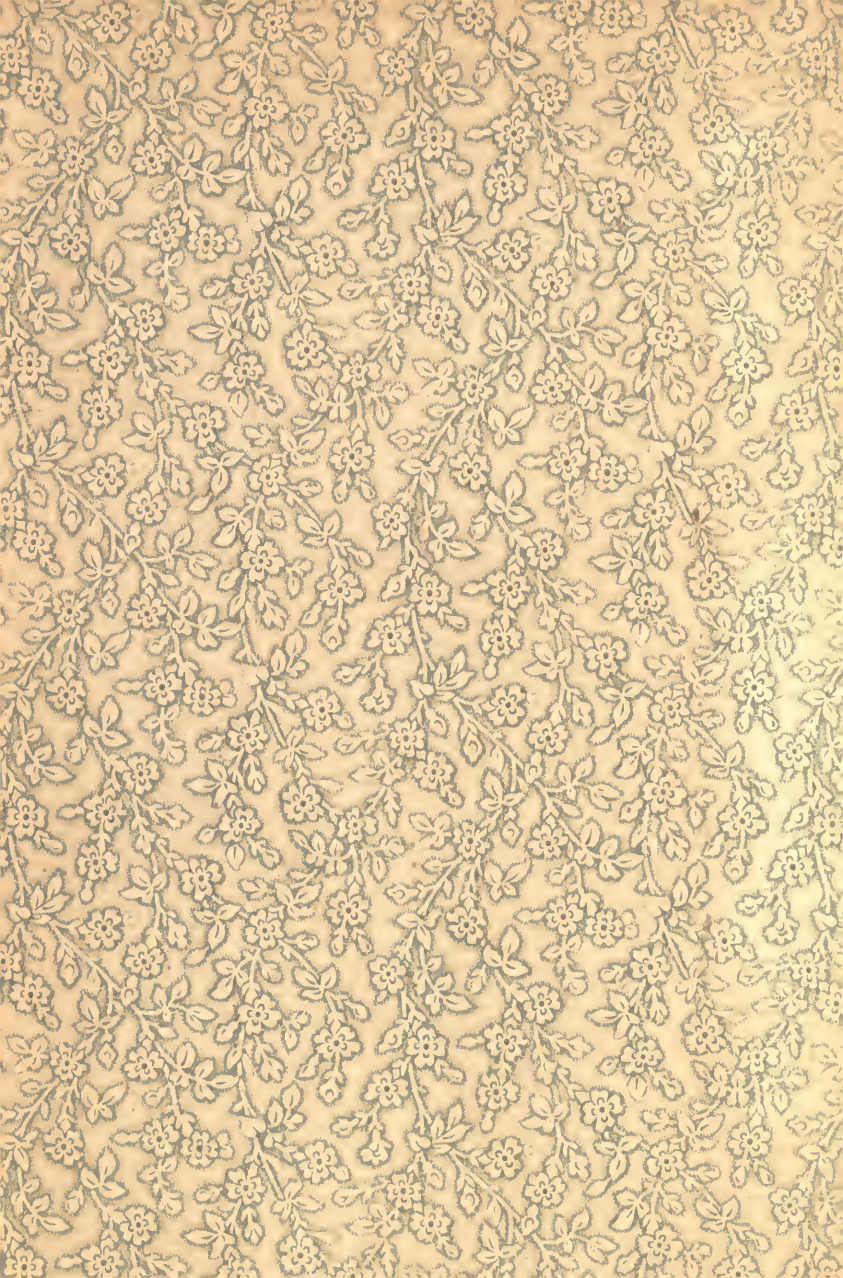


HE WOULD HAVE ME BE BRAVE.









Frances I Katzenberger.

From photograph taken by JOHN W. GARVER, Greenville, Ohio.

He Would Have Me Be Brave.

A STORY TAKEN FROM LIFE.

BY

FRANCES I. KATZENBERGER.



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1895.

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TO

MISS JOSEPHINE WEBSTER,

TO WHOSE KINDNESS AND WORDS OF ENCOURAGEMENT
I OWE MUCH,

I AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATE
THIS BOOK.

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CHAPTER I.

WOULD HE LIVE?

THE little town of Cloverdale was naturally a quiet place; but on this bright afternoon in June it was more quiet than usual. Even the bees that had strayed from the surrounding clover fields (from which the town no doubt had derived its name) had a solemn tone to their naturally busy hum. And the village people with curious and awe-struck faces, were gathered in little groups of twos and threes, talking in subdued tones: "Would he live?" "Would he live?"

The pastor of this little flock had suddenly been stricken with a very serious if not fatal illness. It was necessary to perform a dangerous operation; and even that would only be giving him one chance of life out of ten. He had been in perfect health only a few days before, and the people could not comprehend the suddenness of the change.

Across the bridge that spanned the swift-flowing river that divided the east from the west part of the town, came the gray-haired village doctor with two learned physicians from the city. Yes, they were coming. They could tell it was the doctors by their dignified walk and self-confident air. Would the patient sufferer stand the ordeal, or would he die under the surgeon's knife? His chances of life and probable death had been discussed over and over by those simple villagers. And now the doctors were coming. Oh, what hope and fear hangs upon the doctor's decision. Who has not had a loved one hanging over the awful precipice of death, and waited with streaming eyes and heart-throbbing between hope

and fear; waited for the doctor's coming, he whose coming so many times brings hopelessness and despair?

How was it with two loving hearts in the little white cottage at the west end of the shady village street, where, in a quiet but light and airy chamber, Robert Grey's life was swiftly and surely ebbing away? He was lying quietly on a bed of snowy white in the center of the room, and had his head slightly raised. With one hand he firmly clasped the hand of his wife, who was the only other occupant of the room.

"Yes, Mary," he had said, "let us have all the light and sunshine that we can coax into the room." But he did not add what was in his heart: "For this is the last earthly sunshine that I will ever see." Not but what they had looked the future in the face together, and had talked calmly of his, to him, almost certain death; but after he had told her that he feared he could not live, he knew that she still clung to hope. Poor soul, it was well for her and him that she did hope, for it was this one ray of light gleaming through the darkness of her soul that gave her strength.

When the young clergyman was first stricken, the doctor had hinted at a trained nurse from the neighboring city, but he would hear of nothing of the kind. "You will nurse me, won't you, Mary? I will try not to be hard on you," he said, his eyes looking longingly into hers. "Yes, Robert, I will care for you, no matter how much attention you need."

After the kind-hearted old doctor, whose sympathy was thoroughly aroused at the touching scene, had sent the young wife out of the room on some pretended errand, he turned to the bed. "I don't want to discourage you, for God knows you will need all the encouragement that I can give you, but don't you think you had better get a

nurse? We can't tell what is before you, you know; it might be a little hard on her, you know."

The young man looked up with a faint smile. "Yes, I believe I know what to expect; but I know Mary too well to think that she would leave my bedside. I will spare her all I can. And if my suffering becomes too great for me to bear alone, I know where to turn for aid and strength. He who has been my hope and stay through life certainly will not forsake me in death," he said.

His child-like faith and confidence touched the heart of the listener in a way, tender as it was, that it had not been touched for some time. And looking at him pathetically, the young man went on:

"And if it was not for my darling wife and the sin which abounds in the world, against which I have been battling in my weak way, I would be willing—nay, anxious—to give up this form of clay, to be numbered among the blood-washed throng at God's right hand above; to exchange this world, which at best contains weariness and heart-burnings, for that shining world of peace and rest. Not that I complain, for it has gone better with me than it has with many. You know God has promised to temper the winds to the shorn lamb."

The old doctor, who, although he had seen much sorrow himself, had not, as is the case with some, become selfish thereby; nor had he become hardened by his constant association with pain and suffering, but instead, his sympathies were so deeply aroused as to cause him inconvenience many times. On this occasion he did not try to hide his tears, but let them course unheeded down his cheek as the dying man went on:

"And now I am a shorn lamb in the full meaning of the word, since my physical strength has been taken from me. Do not take my wife away from me or spoil our

last few days together by bringing a stranger into our chamber. Let others take charge of everything else, but let me have Mary to myself."

And when he sometimes grasped her hand so tight as to give her pain, she did not know that it was caused by his sufferings. He felt that it would have been selfishness to have kept her constantly at his side had she known the extent of the agony he endured; so with superhuman effort he concealed it from her loving and watchful eyes.

In the three short years of their married life, his wife had been all in all to him, aside from his religious faith and sincere piety: To many—nay, to all except her husband—Mary Grey was that proud minister's wife. But to him she was everything. She could sing his soul into raptures; and sometimes, when his best efforts were tolerated at best, or he could see an ill-concealed frown on the face of one of the uneducated members of his congregation, and they would say among themselves, "No religion! No religion! He could get as much religion into his sermons if he took his text out of a McGuffey's speller!" and this was carried to him with zeal and very often with slight additions, he would say, "Mary, let us sing something." She seemed to understand him. It was very seldom that he did any of the singing, except to help her start the hymn. Then he would lean back in his chair and listen to her sweet voice until the troubled waters of his soul were stilled.

On the third morning of his sickness, the morning of the day which was to bring prolonged life or sudden death to the young husband, he had looked at his beloved nurse with a brave smile. "Mary, sing something to me. I know that would do me more good than all the doctors."

She turned her face from him to hide the gasp that was wrung from her heart, but reached to a little stand by the

window for her hymn-book. This was more from habit than necessity, for she knew every one of the good old songs by heart. She opened the book and began that time-honored hymn, "Rock of Ages."

She sang a few lines, but the lump in her throat rose higher and higher. Her husband, seeing how pale she looked and how her voice trembled, laid his hand tenderly over hers, saying, "There, dear, that will do. I feel better already, and if it is so hard for you to sing I will not ask you again until—I am well."

"Until you are well, Robert? God grant that it may be so, for what would I do without you? What could I do without you? Life was empty until I met you, but for the three happy years we have lived together you have filled my life with the fullness of love. Surely the Lord whom we have worshiped together will not separate us thus soon."

"Yes, dear Mary," and his hand tightened over hers as a spasm of pain racked his manly form, "it will be hard on you to be left alone in the world again, and for that reason I would like to stay with you, if it is God's will; but if I must go and leave you, you will follow me I know. I feel easy about that, Mary."

"But, Robert, how can I leave you go? If you go, take me with you. Oh, if we could only go together!" and for the first time they both gave way to their feelings in tears and wept as if their hearts were broken.

"Mary, pray." He was the first to speak.

And the young wife, still holding her husband's hand, knelt before the bed and prayed with all the fervor of a despairing soul. She prayed for strength, and that her husband's life might be spared to her, and that he should be restored to health and strength, if it was the divine will. And then she came to the end. "Not my will,

O Lord, but thine be done." She ended with a sob that was wrung from the depth of her soul.

"There, Mary, come and sit by me; come nearer. You are a brave little woman. I should not ask so much of you. It seems wrong that you should be attending to my wants when I should be waiting on you. No, Mary, you must not sing if it hurts you," but she had again opened the book.

"I will just finish the hymn I began." She had but finished "Rock of ages, cleft for me, let me hide myself in thee," and had gone to the window to replace the book, when she saw the three doctors crossing the bridge. Her heart turned cold within her, and turning to the bed, she laid her head beside that of her husband, gently stroking his hair with her soft, white hand, as she pressed her cheek to his. "Oh, Robert, they are coming."

"Yes, dear; be brave," and with what strength remained in his arms he drew her to him. "We will say good-by before they get here."

She raised from the bed as the three doctors came into the room. One of them, noticing the look of unutterable agony depicted on her face, stepped quickly to her side. "Oh, no, I need no help; I am strong," and with one lingering, despairing look into her husband's eyes, who lovingly returned the glance, she left the room, and the door that closed after her separated her forever from the husband of her choice; for what took place in that chamber of suffering only the three doctors and the recording angels know. The patient lingered about an hour after the fatal but necessary operation, and then without regaining consciousness his spirit returned to the God who gave it; to Him whom he had so faithfully tried to serve during his short sojourn on earth; to Him who, although he be the searcher of hearts, is all love and tenderness,

and the intensity of his search is as purifying in its influence upon the sin-stained hearts of poor erring humanity as the forked and livid lightning is to the vapors arising from the impurities of the earth.

Our friends, under the guise of kindly interest, very often point out to us our mistakes and shortcomings; but the pleasure it affords them to do so is soon discerned, and instead of being profited thereby, our whole soul is aroused with indignation at the injustice. We do not like to have our weaknesses exposed and our disappointments laid bare. We do not care to have our dreams and fancies painted. When they are made public, or only laid before us, we disown them. We feel that only those whose love for us is of such a nature that the pangs it causes us to have our faults laid before us is only a reflection of those endured by them in discharging the painful duty, have a right to approach the inner chambers of our hearts, where dwell the silent motive powers which prompt to action. And even they must enter cautiously and tread lightly, lest they leave the imprint of the cruel nails upon the sensitive flesh, and arouse a feeling which, although we may conceal from them, and not even own to our own hearts, still exists, and casts a chill upon the sweet communion of soul with soul.

Robert Grey had endured the scourge of the severe criticism of an over-exacting people, and, as is the case with all mortals, met with discouragements which almost overwhelmed him. But he had also put his trust in Him from whom comes the peace that is past understanding, and when the trying moment came, a bliss so placid and serene filled his whole being that he was almost stifled with its warmth. His earthly attachments seemed to have gone out of his heart to make room for the heavenly light. The thought of his wife was the last to leave its

resting place. With eyes in which love and entreaty were blended he looked to heaven. "Unto thee, O Lord, I commend my darling." Then with a bright smile, which bespoke of heaven, he submitted to that which would rob him of consciousness—that consciousness that he knew would only be regained in that world where the wicked cease from troubling and the weary are at rest.

What mattered it to the dying man what had been the last decision of the learned body of theologians as to the exact locality of the abode of the souls of the redeemed? What mattered it if he was to spend his happiness in a place set apart, or in eternal space, so long as his heart assured him that Christ, through the radiance of his love, would guide him through the chilly waters of death and with the angels be his companion on the other side?

So, as the different bodies of believers are swallowed up in the word church, and that word is lost sight of in Christ, like the streams which wend their separate ways and at last all end in the sea, so the differences of faith will at last all blend in the ocean of truth and reality in the infinite.

CHAPTER II.

HOW WOULD SHE TAKE IT?

WHEN Mary Grey first realized that she was a widow she was stunned. She was again left alone in the world that had never been over-friendly to her. She was an orphan, and when she made the acquaintance of Robert Grey she was a music teacher in a small town many miles from her childhood's home. She had been born on a farm, where she lived until she was sixteen years of age, when her father and mother both died, leaving her very little of this world's goods. The little that she had, she gathered together, sold it for its money value, asked the advice of no one, and went to a distant city to study music. Eighteen found her without means, but with a fair training in her chosen profession. "She had a voice that would improve wonderfully with practice," her teacher had said, and practice was certainly all that she needed, with both voice and instrument.

By the Professor's kindness and influence she was enabled to obtain a class in an adjoining town, where she also was chosen leader of the choir. In this way she was able to make a comfortable living. She was of a quiet and reserved nature. Proud they called her. She mingled very little with young people of her own age. Had the people known how lonely and heart-hungry the young girl felt at times they would have softened toward and been kinder to her.

Our natures are not all alike. While some are bright and cheery, others are silent and hard to understand, and those are the ones that should arouse our deepest solicitude; for while we may think them cold and indifferent,

they may be yearning for sympathy. They are usually painfully aware that they are not appreciated, and for that very reason are never at their best. We all know that to do ourselves justice we should be happy, and to be happy we need friends who love us and are so deeply interested in us that they not only rejoice in our success, but feel and regret our disappointments. Then we should never neglect an opportunity to do good. Who knows, one smile or kind word may be the means of arousing all that is noble and good in some heretofore neglected person's soul? For there are more people that lead unhappy lives, and therefore in many cases unprofitable ones, through a lack of friendly interest, than for any other cause. Mary Grey belonged, in a measure, to this unfortunate class. People thought because she did not respond to their first attempt at friendliness she did not care for friends, while it was the intensity of her loneliness that was making her timid and hard to approach.

One morning, as she was about to take her place in the choir, she noticed that there was a stranger in the pulpit. He was to preach a "trial sermon," they told her. He was young—not over twenty-five. "Poor man," she thought, he has a trying ordeal before him. "A trial sermon!" She knew what that meant, for she remembered the time when she had gone through the same kind of ordeal, when her voice had been put to the test. She knew that a brave front was necessary, no matter how much the heart might quake. "And he is so young, too," she thought, remembering her early battles with the world.

She felt herself becoming more interested in him than was common for her to be in a perfect stranger. "I am afraid he will fail," was her first thought, but when he

took his text and entered into his discourse her doubts fled. He handled his subject in such a scholarly way that she could see at once that he would not fail on that score. He did not fail. They were well pleased with his sermon and asked him for another trial the next Sunday, and on that day they hired him for three years. Many times his heart almost failed him as he entered the pulpit. "Will I succeed? Will I continue to please my congregation?" He knew that his God would understand and have pity on him, but would the people? Would they be so merciful?

He soon learned to listen for and to the sweet voice of the choir leader, who sang, he sometimes thought, to him of hope. They soon became acquainted, and seemed to be drawn together from the first. It may have been by a mutual tie of loneliness. He too was alone in the world, his parents having both died of a fever long before he was old enough to remember them. A rich uncle had taken the baby Robert into his family and done his duty by him according to the dictates of his conscience. He gave him the same advantages that he gave to his own, but of that love and tender care that every child's heart craves he knew nothing. When he grew up into young manhood his uncle took him from the public school and sent him to a university, where he graduated. No longer caring to impose upon the kindness of his uncle, who had a large family of his own, he had resolved to henceforth battle for himself.

The spirit of independence, as well as the similarity of their experience, drew those two young people together. Their acquaintance soon ripened into friendship, and friendship into a deeper feeling, and before the first year of his pastorage was over they had married. And when the heart-broken woman's first passion of grief was spent

she sat thinking of the two years of happy married life they had spent there together. He got along fairly well to the end of the three years. His salary, with the sum that she received for her services, made them a comfortable income—plenty for two people with such simple tastes.

At the end of his pastorage here he had received a call to the Cloverdale church. "Surely," thought his hopeful wife, "if he pleased those intelligent people here he can not fail to satisfy the simple-minded people at Cloverdale." So they had started with cheerful and willing hearts to their new field of labor. But alas for human hopes; the very thing that they had thought would be in his favor was against him. The people were too illiterate to comprehend the depth of his logic. They pronounced his notions and language too "high-fangled" for them. It was not what they had been accustomed to. They had had a preacher who had sometimes addressed them in the same kind of language that they were accustomed to using among themselves, which, although it was not very elevating, gave them a feeling of fellowship. But he never hesitated to address them as sinners. He told them that he knew there was a hell, and that he was glad of it; and when he sometimes, in his earnestness, acted as if he would not be adverse to helping speed the journey of those who disagreed with him to that dreaded place, they did not mind it. It had the effect of frightening some of them into trying to be good. When one of the better class of his hearers remonstrated with him, he said, "That is the kind of talk that people need," and declared with vehemence that he believed in "calling things by their right names."

"Mary," her husband had said to her after they had been settled in Cloverdale about a month, "I begin to

believe what a good old minister once said to me, that an educated congregation, if they are a little over-exacting, are not as hard to please as an ignorant one. He said: 'It is not so hard to have your sermons criticised by people who understand you, as to have them picked to pieces by those who do not know when you do preach them a good sermon.' "

There was one class of his hearers that appreciated his efforts. This was the younger members of his flock; with those the faithful young couple had labored hand in hand, and they were bright enough to know that they had been benefitted in many ways by their friendship and companionship, and especially had they made wonderful improvement in their singing and music.

But now the young voice that had urged them on by cheerful words of encouragement was stilled forever. Silently and with sad hearts they made their way to his former home to take a last look at the face which had once shown such strength and depth of character, and was now calm and serene in the coldness and stillness of death. Their floral tribute, a beautiful white anchor, was certainly a fitting one, for many times he would have despaired had not hope been an anchor to his soul both sure and steadfast.

The day of the funeral came. "Yes," the crushed young widow said, when they consulted her wishes, "I will take him back to his childhood's home and lay him to rest in the little church-yard on the slope of the hill of which he told me so often, where he spent so many happy days."

Oh, happy days of childhood! It is well that the simple fact that they live and have their health is enough to fill their little hearts with joy. Were it not so, the orphan would not have remembered his former home with such keen pleasure.

She would have the funeral services at the house, and take his beloved form to the train directly from the little home nest he had loved so well. A kind-hearted neighbor and his wife offered to accompany her on her sad journey.

Everything was now ready. They had procured the services of a minister from an adjoining town. The people came in flocks, until the little house and door-plat would hold no more; some from real sympathy, and some as they themselves said, "to see how she would take it; to see whether grief would bend her haughty head." The "she" that they referred to looked on with eyes which saw not. What mattered it to her what those idle gossipers thought; she was thinking how soon the form of her faithful husband would be hidden from her sight forever.

The few appropriate words had been said over his body, and the solemn procession was passing through the gate. If the idle watchers were looking for something in her behavior to discuss and condemn, they certainly were gratified; for, if they expected her to come out of the house leaning heavily on the arm of some good old sister of the church, with her face hidden by a heavy black veil, they naturally would have, as they declared, the breath knocked plump out of them by seeing her walk alone, with her head erect and her veil thrown back.

"No, I will walk alone; he would have me be brave. No, I could have nothing over my face; I would die of suffocation." So they let her have her way, and with one hand on the coffin she walked to the carriage which was in waiting. And the form of the youthful divine went out of his gate to go in no more forever.

The procession wound its way sadly and slowly through the shady streets, across the river bridge, past the little brick church where he had been the devoted pastor for one brief year, but where his earnest, appealing voice would

never again ring out strong and clear; on past to the station, where the little party were hastened into the east-bound limited express.

The little group of women who were still standing at the gate, discussing the sickness, death, and funeral in all its details, were unanimous in declaring that if it had not been for that strange look in her eyes, which had frightened them just a little, they would think "the stuck-up thing did not care one whit."

"I, for one," spoke up one of them, "shall not take her part by saying that she took it hard, when people ask me. My daughter-in-law had to stay at home with the children, but of course she will want to know all about if she took it hard and everything, and I for one will not take her part."

"Well," said another, who remembered the stony look in her eyes and was not so emphatic in her remarks, "it is not what I have been used to. When brother John died I cried so hard and took on so that people could hear me from the outside of the church-house. I think when people have a great sorrow they will show it. I know that I could not help it. People told me afterward that it was real affecting; it made them feel like they had been to a real funeral. Now, I could go home this blessed minute and forget in half an hour that I had been to one."

"Yes, Mrs. Dalton," spoke the third, "the future will tell. We will keep our eyes open. Actions speak louder than words. We will see if she shows the respect that Brother Grey deserved. I always did say the dear brother was a deserving man." With this she cast a guilty look upon the group about her, as if she expected to be corrected, and then went on. "I believe in showing respect for our departed friends no matter what it costs.

I, for one, don't think she should wear a stitch but what is black for two years, nor hardly as much as speak to a single man. But we will see, we will see. He was such a learned man, and preached such excellent sermons. I always did say his talk made us forget things earthly and caused our minds to soar to a loftier sphere."

"Yes, but she is not the kind of woman to show the dear brother the respect that he ought to have. Now if he had been my husband I would know how to act," spoke Miss Green, a spinster of thirty-five, with a far away look in her eyes which spoke of an inexhaustible store of unsolicited wifely devotion. But she was prevented from saying any more by a score or more of contemptuous eyes, which said in so many different ways, "What do you know about such things?" and some looks even went so far as to say, "Poor thing! you will never know the luxury of mourning for a departed husband."

"Faith, and it is rale glad that Oi am that our holy father is not allowed a woife, to be a holding up her head like a pacock and a domineering over us."

"Shist! shame be on to your head, Bridget O'Grady. It is not for the loikes of us to be talking in a light manner about the holy father's business."

But the sacriligious Bridget only emphasized her last remark by a grunt and a firm step forward. "Oi meant no irriverince to the holy father or the Holy Mary's church, but you know, Mrs. Murphy, that if he was allowed a woife she would be a-strutting about loike the rest of them, niver thinking to associate or shake hands with the loikes of us."

"As far as the shaking hands is concerned, she need not care to," said Mrs. Murphy, looking down at her own grimy hands, hardened by much toil. "Yis, it is rough

that our poor, old hands are, but it was caused by honest toil, and not from sitting in the sofa-chair and acting the foine lady. And very foine ladies we would make!" and she laughed heartily as the picture of herself and Mrs. O'Grady acting the lady presented itself to her honest old mind.

"And," continued she, determined to keep up her side of the argument, "who is prouder than you are, Bridget O'Grady, when you get to putting on some of your grand old Irish airs?"

"Yis, Mrs. Murphy, Oime proud of me good name and me honor, as ivery dacent woman should be, and the highest feather in me cap is the good old Irish blood that flows in me veins. And wasn't me father overseer over one of the oldest and foinest estates to be found in bonny Ireland? And wasn't he allowed to have iverything his own way, just as if he was the master hissilf? Just cause it is that Oi have to be proud."

And with this bit of pleasantry the crowd separated, the two daughters of Frin going down separate streets to their respective homes, which they declared were comfortable, if not ilegant.

CHAPTER III.

THE BURIAL AND SEARCH FOR PUPILS. *

MEANWHILE the train was speeding along with its little band of mourners and their lifeless charge; but with all its speed it was sundown before they reached the end of their sad journey. It being impossible to make the necessary arrangements and procure the services of an undertaker at that late hour, they placed the remains into the hands of one, with instructions for an early interment in the morning, and proceeded to find lodgings for the night, which they did in a quiet part of town, away from the curious gaze of strangers.

Contrary to her friends' expectations Mary Grey slept soundly. She slept the sleep of exhaustion, and did not awaken until the sun was shining brightly in the eastern sky. "The sun and birds seem to mock my sorrow," she thought as she stood looking out of the window, "and the dear eyes which loved them so well will never see them again."

She allowed them to do what they would with her, and in a very short time after she had awakened to her grief they were on their way to take Robert Grey to his last resting place. "This is a fitting time to lay poor Robert away," she thought, "when the morning sun is shining, for it surely can be said of him that his sun set while it was still day; yes, while it was yet morning."

"No wonder," she thought, as she looked with streaming eyes around the quiet church-yard, after the last bit of earth had been heaped upon the grave, and the words had been pronounced,—“From dust thou art, and to dust thou shalt return,”—“that Robert loved the place. If he

only knew that he was back to the spot so dear to him. But what a different home coming to the one he pictured to himself, and to me sometimes. But he would be pleased to have it so."

Having no time to lose, they then gave orders to be driven immediately to a stone cutter, where they left orders for a simple white slab to be placed upon his grave; that was all that her limited store would permit. When she was asked what inscription she desired, she answered by giving the man a sheet of paper with his name, date of birth, and date of death, and those simple words which meant so much to her, "He hath done what he could."

After securing the promise of the sexton—who remembered the sunny-faced Robert as a little boy (his uncle had long since moved to a distant city)—to see that the work was well done, the little woman with her attendants started on their sad journey homeward. "I will come back myself to plant some flowers on his grave in the spring," she thought. "May his grave ever be kept as fresh and green as his memory will be, enshrined in my heart."

One of the most trying ordeals was still before her, the coming home and entering the cottage that had been her home and his home for one happy year, without him. When she reached the place everything reminded her of him: the wicker gate that he had entered so often with bounding step; the rose bush at the corner of the house, which had been his especial charge, was just beginning to bud, but the caretaker's eyes, which had watched it with such keen pleasure, would not be there to gladden when it would be crowned by the glory of its blossom.

The well-meaning women that had been left in charge could not hide the traces from her loving eyes. Here was

his favorite chair, there was the hook on which he was wont to hang his hat. What would she do, what would she do, what could she do without him? She went into the library and laid her hand lovingly and lingeringly on one book after the other of those she knew he had used last. She went to the window and dropped into his study chair, looking out with eyes that were too dazed with grief to see. An icy hand seemed to be closing over heart and brain, when suddenly the thought came back to her, "he would have me be brave; I will do what I know would please him were he here." And a thrill went through her heart. Who can say that love ends with death? The thought of pleasing him was just as sweet, although she knew that his pulseless heart could never again give a responsive throb. Who can deny that there are earthly affections so unalterable and unflinching as not to desire or admit the prospect of another, even though the object may lie mouldering in the grave?

"I will read his books myself, and remain here in this very house. I think I will be able to secure a class in music, and then I will begin the old life over again: the life I led before I met Robert, only it will be a thousand times worse for having known and lost him. But those curious people shall not see my grief. No; I will have no one to stay with me. I am not afraid. The angel spirit of my husband will hover over and protect me."

The next day was the Sabbath, and she went her way, oh so sadly, toward the church she had loved so well; but the one who had helped to make it so dear to her would never preach from its pulpit again. The Sunday previous he had been in his accustomed place, and today his manly voice was hushed forever.

She walked quietly in and dropped into the nearest pew. The first thing that met her gaze was the tribute

of respect that the young people had paid to him, their dead pastor: the back of the pulpit was draped from ceiling to floor with white and black crepe, emblematic of both youth and manhood. But in place of the dear form which was wont to stand in the pulpit, a stranger stood instead. The chair he usually occupied during their young people's meeting, of which he was the honored leader, was also draped in mourning.

"A waste of bunting," said Deacon Hill to his pretty daughter Bessie, who had drawn on his purse-strings for a part of the extravagance.

"It is not bunting, father; it is crepe."

"A waste of bunting, I say," continued he, disregarding the correction. "You may call it what you please, but it won't bring the parson back, nor will it preach us the sermons which are paid for in full until the end of the year."

The silent figure heard nothing. Her thoughts were far away with the lonely form in the church-yard, until the organ struck up for the closing hymn. Then she remembered for the first time that her place had been vacant in the choir. "I will never sing again; for who will care to hear me now, since he is dead." But this world and its realities came rushing back to her. "How can I teach music if I do not sing? I must smother my grief and act as though I had no heart. I must take my place in the choir next Sunday, no matter how hard it will be for me; the voice he loved so well must be the means of bringing my bread and butter now. I will begin my search for pupils in the morning. Some of the people are abundantly able to pay for instructions, and they certainly can not fail to see that the choir renders much better music than it did a year ago."

So, with hope born of a conscientious determination to

do her best, she began her task, which was by no means an easy one.

The first place she tried, where she supposed she would be most likely to secure a pupil, was at the home of one of the parishioners at whose hands she and her husband had always met with the greatest kindness. The lady greeted her pleasantly, and talked kindly without referring to her sorrow. After her caller made known her errand, she said :

“ I am sorry that this should be necessary so soon.”

This was said with such heartfelt sympathy that instead of wounding the quivering, sensitive heart, it had a soothing influence upon the gap so recently made, the scar of which she would carry with her to the grave.

“ But,” she went on, “ I don’t suppose Mr. Grey’s salary was sufficient to save much. A young minister is supposed to get along on almost nothing, and feed the hungry, clothe the poor, and contribute to every beneficiary besides.”

“ If my husband had only lived we would never have complained, but would have been content with a small salary all our lives. We would have been satisfied with each other and God’s blessing upon our efforts,” said Mary Grey, sadly. “ But since he was taken and I am left, I must live on just the same; and it is not only necessary that I should do something at once, but it will help to make life bearable.”

It was an unusual thing for her to confide either her interests or her sorrows to any one; indeed, her husband had been her only confidant since her parents’ death. But she found that this bit of free intercourse did her good, and the sympathy that was extended in such an unpretentious, sincere way, was welcome.

“ How very fortunate that you came in this morning.

We were talking of sending Ellen away to an academy of music. Her training has been sadly neglected, owing to her health. I would so much prefer to keep her with us, and will be only too glad to secure your services. You can choose your own time for the lessons. Any time that is convenient to you will suit us."

So, with the name of Ellen Ferris to head her list, she went on, not a little encouraged. She knew that Mrs. Ferris was not one of the kind so common, who by strict discipline train themselves to say kind and polite things to hide a far different nature, but that everything she said came from the only source of true politeness, a good heart.

The next call she made was at the home of Deacon Hill, who was sitting on the broad piazza with his good wife, enjoying the morning air.

"Good morning, Sister Grey! What could have caused this unexpected pleasure, that of seeing you so early? Betsy and I were just saying as how we were afraid that you would just shut yourself up and pine and pine. But young hearts are soon comforted, and this is the very best thing that you could do—come out among your friends, who will be only too glad to comfort and cheer you up a bit.

"Oh, it's music lessons that you want to give," went on the querulous old gentleman, without giving his quiet wife an opportunity to say a word. "Bessie can sing quite well enough now. I dare say singing won't take girls to heaven, nor will it bring them a husband—at least, not all of them—" with a quizzical look at his wife and then at their visitor, which said in so many words, "If one woman has sung her way into the heart of a man, it is no proof that they all can." 'This was evidence that even the old deacon and his wife were not proof against a little

gossip. "It turns their heads; and besides, it would not do to make song birds of them all, or they would do like the feathered ones do in the autumn, which as soon as they are able to find their own worms and flies, and chirp a bit, fly away in flocks, to pour their sweet songs into the ears of strangers, instead of staying and singing for those who helped to protect them in their helplessness."

He looked at his wife in a beseeching way, as if he imagined his birdling had already soared out of reach of his caressing hand.

"We would rather that our nestling should never be able to do more than chirp, and keep her with us, than to have her turned into a lark and fly away, wouldn't we, Betsy?" The moisture in his wife's eyes, which were turned toward him in astonishment at his eloquence, spoke louder than words. "But a little training might not hurt her. Yes, you can count on Bessie."

The aged couple evidently had the fate of a daughter of one of their friends in mind, who could not only rival the sweetest notes of the birds, but her heart was as pure and guiltless. But she deserted her home nest to sing for strangers (as the old man expressed it), in order to win fame for herself and support for her parents in their declining years. But like a bird lost at sea, she was soon dazed and bewildered, and drawn helplessly into the maelstrom of sin, and came home, crushed and suffering, to die in the arms of her heartbroken but forgiving parents.

No wonder that the memory of that picture was too much for them. They knew that not only are the chasms of iniquity gaping to swallow up the helpless and unprotected girl who battles so bravely to maintain herself, but there are also self-appointed guides, who, with hell in their hearts, false smiles on their lips, and flattering lies on their tongues, are ever on the alert to

lure them into their dark depths. Then they gloat and sneer over their victims for a time, then up and away to new conquests, while she who sees her peril, when it is too late to turn back, just as the turbulent waters are closing over her head, goes down with an agony of heart too deep to find utterance even in a groan.

The hopeful woman's next venture did not prove so successful. She was met at the door by a woman, upon whose face wonder was plainly depicted, and seeing the look, she hastened to make her business known.

"I have come to see if you would like to have your daughters take lessons in music and singing."

The woman answered her with the question, "And who may the person be who wants to give the lessons?"

"I am trying to obtain a class for myself."

"Oh!" and the look of astonishment turned into one of open astonishment. "I did not know that you purposed remaining here. I would rather my children did not take lessons from a woman. When we hire an instructor we will engage a skilled one from the city."

With her spirits on the ebb, Mary Grey rang the next door-bell. This was at the home of Mrs. Green. This lady had her own standard of right and propriety, and woe and disaster to those whose conduct did not meet the requirements which she was never loth to lay down. Mrs. Grey had never found her congenial company, but she must seek pupils where they were most likely to be found.

She was not prepared for the fire of criticism to which she had to submit, however. After looking her over, the woman said: "If you have really concluded to remain in Cloverdale, where you know you have nothing but strangers about you—no one who has any interest in you—I hope you will protect yourself by getting some

respectable middle-aged woman to stay with you. But I would think it would be advisable for you to pack up and move to a place where you have relatives, or at least people who know you."

"But," said the helpless woman, "I have no where else to go, and so have made up my mind to remain in the the house where my husband left me. And so far as staying alone is concerned, I am not afraid. I would rather be alone. I would be very little company to any one."

"I did not suppose that you were afraid, but it would be such an impropriety for a young widow to stay alone. You know people would talk, and it might even be taken by the opposite sex as a sign that their attention is solicited."

The look that this speech brought into the eyes of our heroine should have had the power to quiet the most meddlesome tongue, but her tormentor went on: "I am only telling you this for your own good. We, as examples of pure, virtuous womanhood, can not be too careful how we conduct ourselves. We should guard our actions in such a way as not to give the world a shadow of a doubt of our chastity. But if you are determined to stay here, I will see what can be done for you. I have a cousin who would stay with you for her board and lodging. Her husband spent all her money, and then died. Pity he could not have died a little sooner and left her something to live on. She is a good talker, and just the kind of company you ought to have. I received a letter from her with the good news that she was coming to see us, and would in all probability remain with us a year. I am perfectly delighted with the prospect, and could not think of allowing her to go anywhere else, but I would give her up to you at the sacrifice of my own feelings. We are not

so much to help our fallen sisters rise as we are to keep them from even the appearance of going astray. I will write to her at once, and after I see how we can settle this little affair we will talk about music lessons. Of course, if you expect the best class of people to patronize and befriend you, your manner of living must be entirely beyond reproach."

"I thank you, but you need not take the trouble to write to your cousin. The idea of having some one to stay with me is a new one, and I must have time to think. I will let you know."

At this she arose to go, while an angry look came into the other woman's eyes, caused by what she termed her righteous indignation at the lack of appreciation with which all her good intentions were received. She arose and followed her visitor to the door, drawing her robes of righteousness closely about her, as if she was afraid of becoming polluted by coming in contact with people who did not see their duty through her eyes, with a look in those orbs which said plainer than words, "I have done my duty, and if you will wilfully lay yourself open to suspicion after all I have put myself out to tell you, I wash my hands of you."

The object of all this concern went away with a feeling at her heart which was new. She had drained the cup of sorrow to its dregs at the death of her husband, but in that she realized the promise of Him who said, "I will be a husband to the widow, and a father to the fatherless," and the sweetly comforting thought came to her, "I will meet him again where parting will be no more."

But what was there to compensate for this injustice, for her outraged sensibilities? She could not understand it. No one had ever talked to her in that way before. "How dare she intimate such things to me? Is it a crime to be

left a widow, that I should be punished this way? If so, my retribution has come speedily. Oh, if I only could have gone with him!" But the thought came to her, "He would have me be brave."

The poor woman had need of all the strength those words could inspire, for this was only a fair beginning of what she had to endure the rest of the day. They all seemed determined to help her out of town or find some one to stay with her. One woman had an indigent aunt who would be glad for a home, and she was of such high moral character that to have her under her roof would be proof against any suspicion. Another had a niece. "She is not quite right in her mind, poor dear! but she is so harmless and happy that it would be a comfort to you to have her about."

"Well," said another, "I suppose it will be a great trial to you to pack up and move, and hard work, too, the weather is so warm. Moving is such a task any time of the year. But of course some of us will help you. I talked with my drayman this morning, and got him to promise to haul your things half price. I had to do a great deal of talking, but he agreed at last, since you will be apt to have several loads. These draymen forget themselves sometimes, and act as if they owned the goods and we the dray. Have you decided where you will make your future home?"

The poor woman, too astonished to interrupt her would-be helper, robbed of her power of speech by her audacity, listened to the end in dumb despair.

"Mrs. Jones, I have nowhere else to go, and since the remainder of my earthly existence must be passed somewhere, I have concluded to remain here. And why should I not? I must earn my own bread again, as I did before I was married. I must turn music teacher again,

and the little that can be earned here will buy more comforts than a larger income in a city. And the crowds and crowds of people, with no companionship, would be intolerable to me. Mrs. Jones, why should I not stay here, where my husband left me?"

This question was asked without resentment or bitterness, but with a child-like simplicity that appealed somewhat to the woman's better nature.

"Oh, I see no serious objections to your staying here; but a lone woman should necessarily be very careful to live above suspicion. It won't do to give people room to talk, for when people once get started there is no way to stop them. I don't mean that you would do anything wrong, of course; I only wanted to put you on your guard. I'm real glad that you told me that you intend to give music lessons, so that when people ask me I can tell them what you are going to do. And of course you will get some respectable middle-aged lady to stay with you."

Mary Grey waited to hear no more, but started for her lonely home. It was nearly sundown, and she had just three names on her list. She had started out in the morning determined to renew her battles with the world bravely, but she returned in anything but a heroic spirit. She had mingled so little with the world that she knew very little of its ways. She had received her early training from parents who held themselves aloof from all that was narrow and debasing, and had always been told that they who gave the necessary attention to their own business had no time to devote to the affairs of others, and that no one should tell the faults of others unless they were sure that they had none of their own. Indeed, if the injunction of the Bible was strictly carried out, how mute would be the tongues of faulty humanity: the command, "Let him who is without sin cast the first stone."

One of her father's proverbs (as she was wont to call them in her happy girlhood days) stood out in bold relief in the development of her own character: "Who don't trust is not to be trusted." She knew that this faith in humanity, which her father had manifested during his whole life, had proven against him on many occasions, but she did not begrudge the few dollars that she knew she had lost thereby. "I would rather have had him just as he was, if he had not left me a cent."

The time that passed between the death of her parents and the meeting with her husband was spent in such a way as not to give her an insight into the failings of those with whom she came in contact. And her acquaintance with her husband and marriage to him certainly did not have a tendency to mar her sweet, simple trust.

She entered her own gate weary and footsore. Oh, what a hard day's work it had been! She never had been so tired either in body or in spirit, nor had she ever had such a deep, dull pain at her heart. She went to his rose bush, and, pinning one of the fragrant blossoms over her heart, she entered the house.

"Oh, why should I be denied the one little comfort, that of waiting just where he left me until the welcome call shall come to join him in heaven. Oh, my husband, why did you leave me so soon? The years of separation may be long—oh, so long! You came into my life when my heart was famishing for some one to love. Was our love too strong, that we should be separated so soon? I can love on and on! but oh, you are so far away! I would rather have you here."

She sank on a lounge and gave way to her overwrought feelings in tears; not violent ones, but deep-drawn sobs which convulsed her frame. They were not only tears of sorrow, but of wounded pride and womanhood. When

she arose she was weak and faint; her tears had only served to exhaust her already overtired frame, so without a thought but of her misery she went sadly to bed, and after tossing wearily about for a time she fell asleep. But it was the slumber which is produced by overwrought minds and exhausted frames; it was the sleep that proves more wasting to our strength than even our waking hours, when we in a weary but persistent routine go over and over the experience of the preceding day.

CHAPTER IV.

TOMMY'S DISCLOSURES.

WHEN Mrs Grey awakened the next morning she was almost too lifeless to arise. The effects of the experience of the previous day served as a weight to hold her down. She could in no wise account for the treatment she had received. She had had a dim consciousness that some of the parishioners did not like her, but in her innocence she did not think that any one would allow their prejudice, their petty likes and dislikes, to influence their sense of justice. It was plain that although she had been cast upon her own resources and the mercies of this world while yet a child, she was still as a stranger in a strange land, with a long, hard lesson before her—a problem with nothing but bitterness in the process of its solution and despair at the result.

Oh, cruel fate that has made it necessary that we should be aroused from this slumber of innocence and trust, where faith in mankind is only a reflection from the placid lake of purity in their own soul; for the picture mirrored in a stream does not depend so much upon the object as upon the clearness and purity of the water's depth. But lucky are they who go through this awakening ordeal, that is narrowing and warping the souls of so many, with an unbiased mind—one that is willing to acknowledge people's virtues, even though they see their shortcomings. There are none so good or so bad as they may be supposed to be; for while there is not a heart so hard but what it could be reached if the proper means were employed, there is still a latent capacity for evil in every individual human heart, and the degree of its devel-

opment is often due to circumstances. Then thrice blessed are they who, while they do not sanction or encourage wrong-doing, still remember their own weaknesses in a way that will inspire a feeling of charity for that of others, even though the nature be different from their own peculiar besetting sin.

Mary Grey had never committed an act that was not prompted by a noble purpose or the depths of a true and holy love. No wonder she thought that the interference of the previous day, disagreeable as it was to her, had been indulged in with her comfort and best interest in view. A nature that was nearer in touch with them would have formed conclusions more in accordance with the truth; and even if they had made a mistake in their calculations, it would have been on the other side of the scale, and the facts in the case would have been magnified.

As is the case in all towns the size of Cloverdale, some of the aspiring mammas had their own private reasons why a young widow with a beautiful face and winning manners would (oh, no, they did not say should) choose some other place for her future home; while others would be willing to submit to the inevitable if her stay among them could be made a source of relief to them.

As she went about her morning duties she thought, "God forgive me if my sorrow has made me selfish, or if I lack in love and kindly feeling, but how could I have any of those women to stay with me? They would not be very desirable company. That poor innocent girl would be the least objectionable, and I could not bear to have her about me all the time."

She had seen them with their respective relatives at different times, and felt that she could not bear to have her husband's merits and demerits tried and re-tried, as

if at a bar of justice, nor have her sorrows brought forth from the depth of her soul, as if on parade on review day; and even if it was done to the best of their understanding, and with a zealous endeavor to entertain, it would be none the less unbearable. She felt that if they would only let her alone and undisturbed in her sorrow, she would ask no greater favor of them, and would be so grateful. "They could serve me best by simply allowing me to choose for and serve myself," she thought.

What a vast deal of trouble and inconvenience it would spare the human family if every member could comprehend that his or her particular interference could be dispensed with without loss in most cases and with profit in many! But this was a state of perfection to which our friends had not even aspired, much less attained; for they had all made up their minds that the comfort of their pastor's widow, if not her very existence, depended largely upon their individual solicitude.

After she had set her house to rights, she sat wondering should she try again today, or should she stay at home and rest? She felt that she could not bear to undergo the experience of the previous day. She felt as if she had no rest since before her husband's illness. It was only a week today, but, oh! what a long and weary week. Ages seemed to have passed in the brief space of seven days. Enough had occurred to change from a supremely happy woman to one who had her eyes fixed on death as her goal, the saddest part of which was the long, weary journey that she would be likely to be obliged to take to reach it, since she was ready to faint at the outset.

She had no sooner formed her decision to stay at home and rest when there was a ring at the door bell. Her caller was a boy, the son of Mrs. Green, who began: "Mrs. Grey, my mother sent me to tell you that she was

writing a letter to her cousin, and that she would like to know if you wanted her to stay with you, because she can't finish her letter until she knows, and she wants to send it right away, and that I must hurry back."

"Tell your mother that she had better not put anything in her letter about such an arrangement, for I will stay by myself for the present. Tell her that I thank her for her kindness, but that she had better not mention it."

"Well, my mother said that you would be obliged to have some one, and that she was willing to do all that she could to help you," said the boy, turning on his heel to go; "but she said she guessed that you was too stuck up to knuckle to being helped. I think too that you are proud. You look like you was, and act like it, too. But is it so wrong to be proud? I hear people say so many spiteful things about it that I guess it must be worse than almost any other bad thing. I never saw you do anything but just walk straight, and hold up your head, and not stop and talk to everybody, as almost everybody else does. I guess maybe some of the old maids and them are just mad because your head is a great deal prettier than theirs, and they can't sing like you do," he said, looking at her with a good-natured, comical smile. "But you won't tell my mother and the girls that I told you? because my sister always pulls my hair when I just mention old maid; and it makes her mad to hear any one say that any other girls are nice looking. She wants to be the nicest looking herself. I guess since your man died you are a girl again. Sis says as how they are girls until they get married, and then I guess if their men die or run away or something, it brings them to their second girlhood.

"I know you look more like a girl than Sis does; but if I would tell her so, she would box my ears and not let

me sit in the parlor or eat at the first table or play ball with the boys for a week. Now, you never was a boy, so of course you don't know how hard that would be. But you won't give it away to them, will you? That would be different from just being proud. I heard the girls talking this morning. They said as how they didn't stand any kind of a show when there was an impudent widow about. Then they said some more about widows' caps being sure to win. I know what! I think they are just afraid that you will take their beaux from them. I know that they were talking about you, because I heard ma say to the girls: 'I'm glad there is some one who can make her feel like an ordinary mortal. I think that I made her feel yesterday that she was no better than the rest of us, and that gives me comfort.' She said that if a few other people had the courage to give you a good, generous slice of humble pie once in a while it would do you good and bring you to your senses, and that you was no better than other people,—but I know that you are a heap nicer looking."

This was all told in a way that showed that it was the boy's way of avenging himself for some real or fancied wrong that had been inflicted upon him by the feminine portion of the household, the natural sworn enemy of every refractory lad, who can by intuition, however, find many ways original to himself to console his wounded spirits, those injured sensibilities that stand out so prominently in the capricious mind of a boy.

"And because you are so nice, and are agoing to promise not to tell on me, I will tell you something else that I know. My ma's Cousin Sallie is just as ugly to have about as can be. Our whole family is mad whenever she is expecting to make us a visit. She takes snuff, and eats right out loud, because I guess she enjoys her victuals

with her teeth, tongue and lips all at once. And her tongue—when she bosses ma and pa around and scolds the girls about powdering their faces and frizzing their hair. She says she got a man without anything of the kind—pity she can't get another one now, then she wouldn't be making us such long visits. I would help her to get one myself if I could find some old fellow as would have her. I would tell him she was perlitte and vertuouss, and just as sweet as anything, just to fool him, and then wouldn't he be just as mad as hops after he had lived with her a day or two?

“Then she scolds the girls about some other things, and us boys—she likes us just like pizen! Well, we just have to hold our breaths when she is around, and wish she would bring her delightful visit to a close. No one else has a chance to say a word when she commences. Ma says she puts her in mind of a coffee-mill—we just have to let her grind on until she gets through with her grist. But what makes the girls the maddest is, she always comes into the room when they have beaux, and just sits and sits, until it is too late for them to stay any longer, and that just fills the girls with chuck full of ‘righteous indignation,’ as they call it, but I would name it just common mad.

“Ma and the girls said so many things this morning that I can't begin to remember it all; but I heard them say that they would not put up with her, because they could not have a bit of fun and would just die of mortification or something, and that if you would not take her ma could just tell her to stay where she is. And then they laughed and said it would be such a joke if they could palm her off onto you, because she would prove a better watch-dog than a mastiff with a rat-terrier for company to keep him awake. They said as how your widow's

wiles or something wouldn't do you a bit of good as long as she was around. I just wouldn't have her if I was you, because if you do you will soon wish you hadn't. But you won't tell that I told you? Now if you would just cross your heart before I go, I would know that you would keep your word. I know that if you had ever been a boy, with big sisters of your own, you would not think of telling on me."

"I will not cross my heart, but I will promise, and that will do just as well. But boys should not listen to their mammas and older sisters when they talk, much less tell what they say, even if it were not wrong to tell tales out of school, as you call it. Boys are apt to misunderstand what they hear and make mistakes in repeating them. I will not tell on you, but you had better not listen the next time you hear them talk about their beaux and things, because I know that girls don't like to have such things told, and little boys are sure to tell all they hear."

As contrary as it was to the nature of Mary Grey to hear anything that was not intended for her ears, she could not help enjoying the impetuous tones of the boy, who was trying in all haste to unburden his mind of all he had heard. Here was a genuine bit of at least human boy's nature; for a bit of news causes the small boy as much uneasiness as a rat does a terrier dog, until he has carried it to the ears of those whom he, in his judgment, has decided ought to know it.

She could tell that the boy had been listening to what had not been intended either for his or her ears, but there certainly was a mistake; they could not have been referring to her in that unfeeling way, for she thought, with the innocence and kindly feeling of her own heart: "No woman would talk about me in such an unkind way in my sorrow. We are certainly near enough of kin in the

trials of this life to understand and sympathize with each other."

So without a thought of anger or resentment, she dismissed the little rebel with a reassuring smile, which caused him to forget at once all fears of being found out in his departure from the paths of discretion.

"Well, she is just game! She won't blab more than nothing. I would trust her any time, because she is the nicest woman I ever saw. I don't mind being scolded, as long as they look as kind as she did. And to think that she scolded me for telling her what they said about her. Now when anybody tells our women folks such things, they fly all to pieces and put me in mind of a kite with a lot of tails and fixins in a wind-storm, but they keep on asking and quizzing, just like they enjoyed getting mad; and I guess they do, because they always seem to be hankering after news. But she only smiled, and I think I noticed a few tears in her eyes when I talked to her about her man dying; but she looked so sweet and kind that I know she wasn't crying because she was mad. Well, if I hear them talk any more about her, I am agoing to tell her again." And with this resolution uppermost in his mind, Tommy Green hurried home.

Mary Grey spent the next few days in trying to find more pupils, but without further success. Very few people were able or disposed to hire a music teacher; they were well pleased with the improvement their daughters had made under her instructions in the past year, but that was free of charge and far different from paying for a teacher.

There were several wealthy families living a few miles from town, but how to get to them to offer her services? If she wrote to them, they would wonder why she did not come in person. She was told that one of the require-

ments of a teacher was that she come to their own homes to give their children lessons; even if she secured them as pupils, she felt that she could not do that. A conveyance from the stables was beyond her means, and, good walker as she was, she felt that it would be too much for her strength to go the distance twice.

Three pupils were better than none. They would supply her immediate wants. But she thought, with a pang: "I may have to give up this cottage. Oh, why should such a sacrifice be required of me? I think I will be able to pay the rent one more month. At least I will not leave until necessity compels me, and then I will try to be brave about it. I will not act in a way that would grieve him."

She had no doubt that her husband's spirit had assumed the character of her guardian angel, and the thought of pleasing him had the power of filling her heart with a sad, yearning sweetness which was absorbing in its intensity.

She went to the drawer where she had been in the habit of keeping her private purse. The general store had all been swallowed up by the doctor's bill and funeral expenses, and it was only by the reduction that the parties interested were kind enough to make (without her knowledge, however,) that the dead man's little hoard would suffice to cover the expenses caused by his sickness and death.

Here were a few bills, carefully folded, that had not only been earned by the sweat of his brow, according to the injunction of the Bible, but also by the inspiration of a soul warmly bathed in a Savior's love. She would gladly have kept those as mementoes of his devotion to his duty and his care for her, but she knew that such luxuries would be denied her in future, and, after all, she

needed no such a reminder. The three years they had spent together had erected in her woman's heart (the place dedicated to undying love and lasting memories) a monument that would withstand the ravages of time and the smiles and allurements of this world that would fain cause it to crumble to dust. These bills had been earned and saved to buy comforts for her and for him, and now she must spend them for herself. "But I know he would have me use them, and would only wish that he had the power to leave me more."

Then she drew her own little pocket-book from its hiding-place. It was an unpretentious affair. "I had so little use for a purse," she thought. She had often laughingly told her husband that "since the poor women were denied the luxury of a pocket, it was a still greater comfort to have a strong, overgrown husband with plenty of those conveniences about him for two. It saves us the trouble of carrying and the worry of losing anything valuable, so you see how willing we independent creatures are to shove the responsibilities of life upon broader and stronger shoulders; how willing and glad we are to be taken care of, if we can only find one who cares enough for us to take the trouble."

But now she must reassume the cares of life; so, after counting the amount contained in both, she put it together into the larger and stronger purse. "I will pay the rent for one month, and then, if I live economically, I may be able to remain another. I would be satisfied with so little, if I could only remain here quietly and undisturbed."

She had just framed her wish, when one of her neighbors stepped up to the open door.

"Good morning, Mrs. Jones," she said, pleasantly; "come in. I am glad to see you."

She had just been asking for quiet and solitude, but unconsciously her heart was reaching out for sympathy and companionship. How strange to a woman are the workings of her own heart! for unless she devotes a goodly portion of her time to self-study, she will carry it to her grave a stranger to its impulses, and even then she remains to herself an enigma still unsolved.

Mrs. Jones was a self-satisfied matron of about forty-five or fifty. She had married when she was quite young, but had never had any children. This caused her overabundance of motherly interest to be evenly distributed over the entire town. Even the typical spinster must lay down her laurels to a childless married woman, when her line of duty is once made clear to her, when she adopts as her life work the engineering of the social and matrimonial machinery of the society in which she moves.

Of course half the young people of the town would have been ruined had it not been for her timely interference; the married people would certainly never have found the suitable partners had it not been for her assistance, for which they were very grateful to her, no doubt; and some of the hasty, ill-advised marriages might have resulted in total shipwreck had she not helped to steer them safely through the breakers along the shore and out into the broad and placid waters of married life. It was with the importance of her responsibilities weighing heavily upon her mind that Mrs. Jones made this morning call, with her mind made up to discharge her duty fully to her former pastor's widow.

"Good morning, Sister Grey; you have been away so much lately that I did not have the opportunity to call sooner. You must be very lonely since the poor brother's death, so I thought I would drop over and have a long talk with you and help you to forget your troubles. I

know when I have trouble I would just die if I did not tell it to some one. Of course I always go to my husband, as I suppose you did as long as you had poor Brother Grey with you, but now since he is gone you will have to have some one else to make a confidant of. I tell you it will never do to lock yourself up with your sorrow."

As Mary Grey said, she was glad to see her caller. Her lonely heart was reaching out for nourishment and sustenance. But the feeling of tenderness gave way to one of leaden heaviness; her overwrought feelings seemed to rebound to her heart and congeal there. But she made a brave effort to conceal this from her visitor, who seemed to understand the remedy, but not the mode of application.

"Yes, my heart is heavy," said the poor woman; "but I do not care to burden others with my sorrow—that is, after all, something that we each must bear for ourselves; for while the heart is like a fountain in its love ever gushing forth, it also has a depth in its sorrow which no one can fathom."

"It might bring comfort to you to talk to some one about your plans. I am in no hurry this morning, and might be able to make some suggestions that would prove of great help to you. I have had so much more experience in this world than you. It makes a woman so helpless to be left a widow so early in life, just when she is beginning to learn what it is to have a husband to lean on, and she can not be expected to be able to stand alone when her prop is suddenly taken from under her. Now, with older people it is different. We all find out that those props, no matter how willing and strong they may be, will give a little by time and overweight, and we must fall back more or less upon our own strength as the years go by," said the woman; and we would add:

And happy is the woman who learns this lesson without losing faith in her spouse, for it is, after all, only his nature asserting itself, in thinking that every human being has enough to do to carry its own weight. This may ultimately be nature's plan to prepare us for the separation that must come sooner or later, for through the acquired strength we are certainly better enabled to take care of ourselves.

"I have no great plans to make for the present, and none for the future. I have put my trust in One who has left such words of comfort for the widow, and will take charge of both present and future for those who are willing to take Him at his word."

"Yes, but you must live, and the Lord has only promised to help those who are willing to help themselves," wisely answered Mrs. Jones. "You must have a place to stay, something to eat, and clothes to wear; and, judging from the salary that your husband received, he could hardly have left you much. People seem to think that a minister can live on his religion. Now I think that while religion will satisfy his spiritual wants, it takes just as much bread and butter to keep his mortal soul and body together as it does for any one else."

"Oh, I would have been content with a small salary all my life, if he had only lived. As you say, he could not have left me much, but I have the same means of support that I had before I knew him—my voice. I intend to live on here and give lessons in music. I can not plan much; these plans have made themselves. I have nowhere else to go, nor have I any other way to earn my bread."

"But do you think it would be wise to keep this whole cottage? It would only be rent for nothing. You certainly would not think of living here alone? that would not look well. You will get some respectable old couple

to move in with you. A widow's actions are always watched so closely, and it is always best to be on the safe side. Yes, I will help you to look around, and between us we will surely be able to find some one to move in with you."

"Mrs. Jones, I think I will be able to pay the rent for this cottage for a time, at least. I don't want any one to live with me. I would so much rather stay alone as long as I can afford it, at least; and as far as being safe is concerned, I have always been taught that the innocent need have no fear."

Poor girl, she did not know that this very training made her seem like a foreign element in the atmosphere so prevalent, that of criticism and insinuations. She did not know that the influence brought to bear upon their lives had made them what they were, ever ready to discover a flaw in the conduct of friend or foe, which was no sooner imagined than told and enlarged upon. As we journey through this life, and go on from stage to stage, unconsciously our characters are being moulded like the sediments which cling to the rock, and, after a while, become a part of the rock itself; so the many incidents of life, no matter how small, are the materials employed in the formation of this all-important structure. God has given us our being simply as a foundation or a granary. Some of us have the yearnings, and all alike the possibilities within ourselves, to fill that great storehouse with the richest and choicest grain; and they who have, through their own energy and effort, brought themselves to know the necessary and nourishing from the unprofitable food, and learned to discern the gems from the rubbish and the grain from the chaff, have not only made an important step toward success in this life, but also toward a happy entrance into the life to come.

"I will tell you, Mrs. Grey, how long the innocent are safe: just as long as people will believe them such, and that does not depend upon being able to prove themselves clear in a court of justice, by any means. People used to be considered innocent until proven guilty, but now the order of things is changed; now they are guilty unless they can prove their innocence in a way that will remove every particle of that stubborn thing, doubt. You had better take the advice of a friend and not keep the whole cottage, much less stay alone, for I tell you if a woman once gets herself talked about, all the lawyers and judges in New York City could not clear her in the eyes of the people. And to be honest with you, I can't see myself why you persist so in wanting to stay alone. We might be able to find a few people in Cloverdale that would be good enough to stay in the same house with you."

"It is not that, Mrs. Jones; but why should I not be left alone with my sorrow until I can become so far accustomed to it as to bear it patiently and in silence?" she said, with a world of helpless entreaty in her eyes.

"Oh, I see; you are too proud to let any one see your grief. I don't believe people have made any mistake or done you any injustice there. Have you bought all your mourning yet? They are selling blacks and crepes so cheap now. If I was in your place I would get all that I needed while it is down. I believe black will be very becoming to you, and of course you will wear nothing else for at least a year and a half, then change off gradually into modest grays. It always seems sad to me to see a woman when she first begins to put off the mourning that she has been wearing for her dead husband. It shows that even a widow will forget, and that the memory of her husband must give way to other interests. I think the change of clothing is such a good outward manifestation

of what is going on within. But such is life ; no one is remembered long after they leave this world. I always tell my husband that I want him to show respect for me for a year—that is as long as can be expected of a man ; but with a woman it is different. If you buy your blacks this week, the sewing society will come next week and help you to make them up. You can tell me what day would suit you best, and I will do all the necessary inviting, for I don't believe that it would just suit you to be asking favors of any one. If I let them know in good time, it will give Miss Green plenty of time to get her patterns ready—she cuts by the system, you know."

"I have no money with which to get anything new. A good quality of black material is always expensive, and a cheaper grade always rubs off and would be very unhealthy this warm weather. I have never worn bright colors. The dresses that I have are mostly black and will have to do. I can show respect for my dead husband, no matter what kind of clothing I wear. Respect for the dead means something far different to me than the putting on and laying aside of wearing apparel, or following any set line of conduct. To me it has a higher and holier meaning. It can not be assumed or laid aside at will. It is a garment to be worn upon the heart ; one that never fades, and need never be laid aside to give place to another, but can and should be worn until we exchange all our earthly robes for those of spotless white above."

Mrs. Jones listened to this speech in amazement, as if she could not comprehend the meaning of what she heard. When she recovered her voice enough to speak, she said :

"You don't mean to say that you are not going into regular mourning? Such a thing has never been heard of here. Everybody goes into mourning for a husband

or father and mother, and some have even worn veils for a year for sister or brother. Why, the people would be just thunderstruck to see you coming out in your old clothes, without so much as a crepe veil. You had better cut your expenses by renting a part of the cottage, and go into regular mourning. It won't do to fly into the face of public opinion ; and you know that we are not to bring reproach upon religion by acting headstrong or looking odd from other people."

By this last thrust she expected to gain her point, and looked at Mary Grey in a way which plainly said, "There, now, with all your proud, stubborn notions, you can't get around that point."

"Have no fear, Mrs. Jones ; religion will not suffer from any such causes. It has withstood greater tests in all ages. It does not depend upon the belief or conduct of a person, a town, or a nation. It has outlived the combined forces of all nations and Satan himself for over eighteen hundred years, and surely one poor woman will not cause a doubt of genuineness by doing the best she can, even if she is obliged to wear her old clothes contrary to custom. I do not take that view of things ; I do not feel that it would be in disregard to the memory of my husband or religion. The difference in the rent that you mention would buy very little. I may have a long life before me, and it may necessitate the greatest economy to provide myself with food and clothing, but I think I can remodel my old black dresses in such a way as to make them last for the time that you said I would be expected to wear them."

This was quite different from what the woman had expected. She had anticipated the distinguished privilege of helping to select and plan one or two new dresses, at least ; but the important duty of attending to the making

over of the old ones was still depending upon her, and that was, after all, very absorbing in its nature.

"It is a pity that you can't get one or two new dresses. It would look more like going into mourning; but of course, if you don't see fit, it not for me to say any more about it, for if a woman makes up her mind that she will not, it is as bad as if she could not. I will see the sewing circle, and between us we may be able to make your old dresses over in a way that they can be made to do fairly well."

Mrs. Jones took her leave just a little disappointed. She had not rendered Mrs. Grey near the assistance she had hoped to. "I don't pretend to understand her," she said to the members of the sewing circle; "she talks as if she belonged to a different earth from the rest of us. She says things have a higher and holier meaning to her. What she means by that I don't pretend to know. One thing I do know; that is, if any one has any respect they will show it, and how is any one to do this unless—well—unless they do it."

No wonder they did not understand her; how could they, in a place where people's sorrow was measured by the quantity of tears that they shed, their regard for the memory of their dead by the peculiar shade of black that they put on and the length of time those habiliments of woe were worn. The strict observance of the rules that had been laid down seemed to them to make amends for any other duty in which they might have fallen short.

If any querulous, ill-mated couple made the best possible use of their time during the whole length of their natural life in rendering each other miserable, and, as was sometimes the case, the husband retired from the field and left the victory to his wife by dying, the people would be oblivious to all her former shortcomings, and

she would be regarded in the light of a heroine if she manifested what they considered a due amount of remorse in tears and would have the funeral otherwise conducted in accordance with their judgment; and the general verdict would be: "Well, she showed respect for him, at least; why, she spent her last cent to lay him away respectable."

Poor fellow, if he had had some of that attention shown him while he was still in the flesh to be conscious of and appreciate it, it would have not only added to his vanity and self-esteem but his comfort and happiness as well.

CHAPTER V.

THE MEETING OF THE SEWING CIRCLE.

THE days that intervened until the meeting of the sewing circle Mary Grey spent in looking over her wardrobe. Clothing, in affliction and out, was of such secondary consideration to her that she had not given the subject of what she should wear more than a thought. The nature of this life, with its sins and cares, had always impressed her too seriously. What does the style of clothes that we wear signify, compared to the nature of the food with which we fill our minds and souls! And if the parishioners did sometimes look askance at her trim outfit, the appearance was due more to taste than to any great exertion on her part.

"I do not like to feel ungrateful," she thought, "but I would rather sit quietly down and do my sewing myself; but since they are coming, I will have things in readiness for them."

The contents of one of the closets brought to her notice another task—a sad one, that of laying away or disposing of her husband's clothing. "I will put them all carefully into his trunk and shall never part with them." So, one by one, the articles of clothing that would nevermore be ornamented by the manly form of their owner were laid with tender care into their brief resting place. She had no sooner smoothed the folds of the last dear garment and tenderly, thoughtfully lowered the lid of the trunk and turned the key, when the thought came to her:

"Would it not be selfish to hide those garments away when they would make comfortable clothing for a whole family of scantily provided lads, who would otherwise

have to go pinched and shivering through the coming winter."

The debate between selfishness and benevolence in her mind was soon decided in favor of the boys, and so just as tenderly she unpacked the trunk, and arranging its contents into bundles, she sent them to a family in the outskirts of the town, who had suffered from want the winter before. The people had refused to render assistance because the husband and father persisted in spending his small earnings for drink.

"It is not the poor woman's and children's fault that the man spends everything for whiskey. I don't think I will be upholding wrong-doing, because it is not the poor helpless beings that are doing the wrong. They are no more to blame for his faults than I am, and he himself may be deserving of pity. It may be due to a hereditary inclination or early associations. Of one thing I am certain, he would turn back and redeem himself if he could, but I am afraid it is too late."

She had seen the poor wretch, and noticing the helpless look in his eyes she had nothing but pity in her heart even for him; and feeling certain that the loving hands of the mother would fashion every garment that she sent her into so many small ones to fit the sturdy forms of her darling boys long before the coming winter would send its herald of frosts and snows, she stifled the pangs at her heart, and only wished that she had more to send to them. "And even if the shivering form of the drunkard should find its way into some of their warm folds, I could be doing no great wrong, for since he is past redemption and can no longer help himself or his family, it will only be a trifle toward easing the path to the close of a hard and hopeless although misspent life and to a harder and more hopeless grave," she thought; "and if it were not

for the mercies of God, and we had to depend on our own merits for salvation, how few of us would have a right to hope?"

The day on which the sewing circle was to meet at Mrs. Grey's to assist her in remodeling her wardrobe came, and with it came the society, with an unusually large attendance of its members.

They had never had a satisfactory insight into the life of their pastor's wife; for while she had her husband's love to protect her, upheld as a shield against even a chill from the outside world, to encourage her in "her independent and selfish spirit," as they expressed it, they had stood a little in awe of her; but now, since she had been deprived of her staunch body-guard, they were determined to satisfy their curiosity, and with a zest which plainly said, We have been deprived too long already of our rights.

They had seen a great deal of her on different occasions and under different circumstances, but to go to her in her own home, in the role of helpers, would give them a right not heretofore enjoyed. It would certainly open up a flow of confidence that could not fail to be gratifying. So they each one determined to go and see and hear for herself, and not be obliged to undergo the trying and mortifying ordeal of being enlightened by a second person. Each one, as a self-appointed committee of one on investigation, went early, determined on making the best of the day, but with a stolid determination to hide their inquisitive natures.

"She is hard to understand, but we will find out today if she has anything to give her a right to hold her head above the rest of us," they thought. But they were doomed to disappointment, for they soon discovered that either her life was not such an enigma after all or they did not possess the power to solve her nature. But they

did not know how correct was their first surmise. There was nothing either to hide or disclose. She had only been living her quiet life in her own way; and even though she was of a dignified and reserved nature, her chief reason for not speaking of herself was that she did not think the subject would be of sufficient importance to warrant attention.

So, as the day wore on, with their eagerness somewhat abated, they turned their thoughts and conversation into other channels.

This society was not a church organization, as is usually the case, but a dozen or more of the women of the town who agreed to go together and help any one who had more sewing than they could conveniently manage themselves. An over-worked mother, with her spring or fall supply of little waists and frocks; now and then they were called upon to assist some in preparing for an unexpected journey, for which the necessary articles of clothing were lacking when the summons came; or to arrange the toilets of a whole family to follow some loved form to the church-yard; and sometimes they could even recognize the faint symptoms of a wedding in the near or remote future, judging from the articles entrusted to their hands—a fact which the blushing maiden vainly thought to have disguised. Women's intuition must certainly come to their assistance in the discovery of such things, for surely there is, many times, nothing else that would disclose the secret.

The last place where the society had met was at the house of a struggling young physician, whose wife succeeded in making him happy in spite of delicate health and three small children. "Come," she had said to them, "and we will have a good social time together."

"Dr. Pence will never get anything ahead, if I am any

judge," said Mrs. Jones to Mrs. Dixon. "It's a blessing that he owned that little cottage before he was married; he would never have had enough money again to buy it, with a girl to manage the kitchen, and a wife that thinks of nothing but her children and white frocks for herself to wear. I don't see how he manages to make both ends meet as it is."

"I would think a doctor would have sense enough to choose a healthy partner, and since he did not I suppose he will have to bear the consequences," said Mrs. Dixon, a little meditatively.

"Healthy partner," said the other, with a contemptuous sniff.

"She would have just as much strength as we to do her own work, but—oh, no! she don't care to put her strength to such use; no, not she! She would rather look pretty and pleasant in the eyes of her husband and his masculine friends, if the poor doctor does have to strain every nerve to meet expenses. She never seems to be too tired to take walks with him, and long ones, too, that are a great deal harder on her than doing her own work would be," said a third person.

"And to pose for his admiration! That woman would go to no end of trouble to get a smile from a man. If her own should be taken, she would go on posing for others. It's her nature. She don't care, as long as she is pleasing a man, who he might be. And she is no sort of a manager, any way," went on Mrs. Jones. "I was astonished when she brought out her sewing; ribbons and everything of the best quality. Much cheaper lace would have done just as well for her children's clothes. There are a great many just as good as hers that must go without any. I don't say anything against her buying lace, if she thinks she must have it, but I could have

done so much better with the same amount of money. I have helped so many expectant mothers who had small purses that I know just how to go about such things, and that to the best advantage, too."

She looked about to see how this last insinuation would be received by her listeners. But they would not have had their faces change expression for the world; it would have given Mrs. Jones too much gratification to see that her remark suggested anything new. But that lady went on the same as if they had expressed the greatest surprise:

"You may wonder, because some people never could see as far as others and never will; but those things we sewed on are not all for the three babes already in the world. I took the hint as soon as she told us that we did not need to finish that one lot. You know she told us she could put the bands and things on herself. I thought as soon as I saw them that they were an odd size. She may be able to fool some, but people would have to be slyer even than she is to keep me in the dark long."

"Three babies! Sure enough, what are any of them but babies?" said Mrs. Dixon. "I would think three small ones enough at a time; but some people go on as if they thought no one could bring as good children into the world as they, and they had to do their best—especially doctors and ministers. But their children never happen to turn out any better than others who do not have such pious and healthy influences thrown around them."

This last sally created a hearty laugh. It savored of a wit uncommon even with Mrs. Dixon:

"If husbands were all as easy pleased as the doctor," she went on to say, "we would none of us need to do anything but look pretty, act sweet, and have babies.

They say she superintends everything from garret to cellar, but I know she don't do a bit of the work or she couldn't keep her hands and dress as white as she does. But they do say that she never lets the doctor sit down to the table until she has seen that everything is all right—but if she was obliged to cook the meal herself, I will warrant you she wouldn't be so particular about the exact whiteness of the table-cloth and the kind of bouquet that she has on the table."

"And the kind of table she sets is enough to break up a man with a larger practice than her husband has," said a fourth speaker. "It was well enough for her to show her appreciation of our visit by giving us a good dinner, but they say that she is just as particular when they are alone, and always uses her best china and spoons; but some women do know how to keep in the good graces of the men, if they are not fit for another earthly thing."

It would appear that the women considered this last her crowning fault, for which they could not well forgive her. Poor foolish women; they could not or would not understand that those lordly creatures could be swayed by those same softnesses and small attentions usually attributed to the weaker sex alone.

The society, after rendering decisions for and against several others of their sex, whom they had seen fit to try at their tribunal, left the house of Mrs. Grey well satisfied with their day's sewing, but far from exultant over the termination of various little projects that they had in their several minds and which they had intended, if a favorable opportunity presented itself, to propose to the lady. But remembering the manner in which their offers had been received by her before, each one resolved that the rest should not see their discomfiture; so they carried their plans, with which they had come abundantly sup-

plied, away with them again. They felt no nearer to her than they had before, and only were strengthened in the belief of the haughtiness of the woman, whose quiet dignity they could not understand.

"If that is all she cares about her husband," said one, "no wonder that she did not want to go into mourning. She would not have said a word about him all day if I had not commenced three or four times, and then she hardly answered me. When women don't act natural about such things, especially about a husband, you may make up your mind that their thoughts are pretty equally divided between the dead and the living. I never saw one act like her yet that did not have a beau openly in six months, and one on the sly long before that. She knows what is becoming to her, too. She will look rather nice in those dresses, if they are only old ones made over. If we had known before what we know now, we would have left her do her own work; she will only have that much more time to practice her wiles."

They did not acknowledge, even to themselves, that the worst trouble lay in the fact that they gained such little information, to what they had expected, in exchange for their day's labor.

"I feel sorry for our girls," said Mrs. Jones; "the young men were scarce enough without a young widow to take her pick and choice, but how will it be now? They might just as well wait and see who she wants, and then the rest take who are left. It comes to about that when there is one of those conceited creatures about; but there is one consolation: they can none of them take more than one. Some of them act as if they thought they could get them all, if they were only allowed the privilege."

"The next thing they will do," said Mrs. Dixon, "or

would like to do at least, would be to establish a religion somewhat like the Mormons, where good-looking and fascinating widows would be allowed to have all the husbands they could captivate by fair means or foul ones. I am glad that we all have husbands, or little hope there would be for us now. Oh, I had almost forgotten Miss Green, but perhaps the pretty widow Grey will leave one for her. We will all join our hopes to that effect. Miss Green, I hope you were not wickedly tempted to make some miscuts on her dresses, because such thoughts would be wrong, you know; but it does seem almost like a pity that we could not make her look just a little round-shouldered, or rainbowhipped, or her skirts to sway in the back or on one side or something. I am almost sorry that we did not, on the girls' account. I am afraid that some of them will have to die old maids now, for when a pretty widow once turns the men's heads, they are more exacting and capricious than ever, and they always were hard enough to suit. Don't you find them just a little that way, Miss Green?"

Miss Green, who had all day been the target for the whole company's wit and satire, had borne it with a fortitude that could only be acquired by years of experience and the strictest discipline, but she found this last thrust exasperating in the extreme. "Mrs. Dixon, to hear you women talk one would think that the only lucky or sensible thing any of you ever did was when you managed to get husbands for yourselves; and judging from appearances, some had better never have broken their records, for I see proof every day that there are some things in this life to be borne that are even worse than living a single life. But that is the way with married women. They think that the simple fact that they have husbands gives them a right to sneer over and insult the

rest of us, even if those lucky possessions do whip them six days out of seven, and make them earn the living for the whole family, themselves included, where they ought to look up to us with respect for our good judgment in remaining single," said Miss Green, her words gaining strength as she proceeded.

"Certainly," replied Mrs. Dixon, "we have an unbounded regard for your good sense, especially when your judgment is so in accordance with the essential part of the programme. It is even better than yielding with a good grace, when you are defeated in some earnest attempt; and that virtue, you know, is a pearl of great price to which we can not all lay claim. Oh, yes, we hope to be able to do you justice as superior beings, for while most of us would be glad to be able to retire in a self-satisfying and becoming manner when we are worsted, you are wise enough to take time by the forelock, and arrange your judgment to fit the circumstances as they occur; but it is a sore pity that the members of the other sex are so blind to your innate wisdom, or a blessing, I should say, for they might realize what is slipping from their grasp, and cause you, as unwilling as you might be, to rearrange the whole structure of your resolutions. Indeed, Miss Green, the blindness of the fraternity is something for which you should feel thankful, for it no doubt saves you no end of trouble; and the power to appreciate is necessary to a pattern of perfect womanhood, which, I have no doubt, every single woman is."

"Well, Mrs. Dixon, married life must have been a success in your case, as a tongue-sharpening process; and it seems to be the case with most of you. Then when you have succeeded in getting such an edge on that member as is not even necessary for domestic pur-

poses, you try to bring them back to their normal condition by practicing them on us, and in that way we are obliged to help bear the evil effects of married life, if we have avoided and escaped the snare ourselves. The worst feature of single life," Miss Green went on contemptuously, "is the fact that every woman who has a husband, no matter if he is what God intended such a partner should be or the very poorest excuse for one, looks upon us with pity, not the kind however that is akin to love, but nearer akin to contempt. They think that we must be pining and fretting, and they only wonder that we exist at all. If you only knew how well-satisfied we are, you would reserve your sympathy for a more needy cause. Who ever heard of a free bird wanting to get into a cage, no matter how hard those already caught might try to attract it?"

"When people can tell by certain indications that the bird is no longer young, there are fewer snares set for it. I am glad to hear that single life is so satisfactory and delightful to you, and I think you will be allowed to continue in that serene state, if the lovely widow Grey sees fit to wield her scepter. If there should be any who are not so well satisfied with single blessedness, however, they had better make hay while the sun shines, for they will still have a few days of grace before the widow can, in common decency, come into full power."

Miss Green's eyes spoke volumes, which her tongue denied to utter. She never could be persuaded to make a reply to any insinuation that might be indulged in respecting her age—that would come too near admitting the facts of the remark.

"Sees fit," she said with a sneer, "of course she sees fit even now, and is only waiting for her chosen subjects to see fit to come under her rule. Those days of grace

will be what people assign to her, and not what she will pray for. Not but what she will want the grace; it is the days that she would gladly dispense with. Oh, of course, it is nothing to me how many of those fool-hardy beings she succeeds in wheedling, for I never did have any use for her. I can not endure any one who acts as if they thought the town was built for them, when they have only been in it a year, and those who have lived in it all their lives are simply there by their sufferance; and her actions carry out that idea perfectly. If those dresses we made today were not becoming, we might have done the day's work for nothing for all the good that she would get from them. I did not want to go in the first place, and when I got there I had all I could do to keep my scissors from cutting the goods into anything but shapely garments. The idea of her staying there alone! That proves what she is. She thinks no one is quite good enough to live under the same roof with such a person as she is. Mother is always sympathizing with everybody, and offered her assistance in finding some one, but her haughtiness replied that she had concluded to stay alone, and no one need take any further trouble. We shan't take any more trouble to oblige her, I know. The time may come when she would be glad to have some one to take her part and help her. Pride always goes before a fall."

By this time the two had reached a point where they separated. Miss Green went her way still tingling with the vexations of the day. The fact that she had worked hard all day for one whom she bore no good will was bad enough, but these women had made the day almost intolerable by their taunting remarks—remarks in which they never failed to indulge whenever a favorable opportunity presented itself, and without questioning their rights.

The social position of a single woman is never an enviable one in a town the size of Cloverdale, after she has once crossed the dividing line (wherever the people may see fit to place it) between girlhood and "old maidhood." Every child in town knew, even before it was able to lisp the name, that "Tara Dreen" was an "o'maid." No wonder the poor girl had become sensitive on that point. She knew that the talk of the children was only an echo from the voices of their parents, who, no matter how unfortunate their marriage proved to be, never failed to apply to her the disrespectful term in a disrespectful manner. They did not stop to think that a dissatisfied single life was preferable to an unhappy married one, and that although a single woman missed some of life's joys, she also escaped many of its sorrows.

CHAPTER VI.

THE COMPARISON.

THE first of September found Mary Grey still occupying the little cottage to which her heart clung so fondly. After a few more futile attempts at interference, the people had left her to her own inclinations. She went about with a quiet dignity which, because it was not understood, went still further toward hardening their hearts against her. She taught her three pupils, sang in the choir, and attended all the religious services; but the loneliness of her heart only her God and those who have had similar experience will ever know, and if those who were watching her with such cold, critical eyes only knew it, she carried in her bosom the most humble and contrite spirit of all.

She was far from under-estimating the value of a human soul, but she had seen her husband's life, which had seemed so valuable in her sight, had seemed like a beacon-light along the shores of sin and folly, go suddenly out, and her heart alone seemed left in darkness. "Oh," she thought, sadly, "if God in his plan can so easily dispense with a life like his, what in comparison would be the value of mine? Even though we be the noblest of God's handiwork, we as individuals, are but specks in his sight, for there are millions—yes, multiplied millions of beings like ourselves, with the same hopes, fears, and aspirations thrilling their heart's blood, and whose lives, no matter what their lots on earth may be, are of as much importance to them as ours are to us. God has only bestowed upon us this life to be held in trust for the advancement of his cause and the alleviation

of the burdens of those about us. If we do fall short in our stewardship here, we can but carry it modestly until He sends to us the message to lay it down.

"It will be impossible to stay here longer than this month, even if I succeed in getting more pupils. I can not pay for more than two rooms, with the additional expense of fuel and warm clothing."

She felt more sad and lonely than usual on this bright September morning. "If our marriage had only been blessed with a child, what a comfort it would be. With the soft, clinging arms of a babe—his babe and my babe—about my neck, I could bear almost anything. God would have provided a way for me to support it. But for what? Might it not have been born to lead a lonely life, like I am today? After all, the wish is a selfish one—one in which I will never indulge again."

She tried bravely to put the longing from her that is so deeply rooted in the heart of every true woman; for the maternal instinct, which is so unmistakably evinced in her infancy, develops with her years, and grows in depth and strength from the time that she clasps the first tiny puppet in her hands, on through her childhood, when her heart overflows with love for anything that she can clasp to her bosom, no matter how slight the resemblance to a doll may be. The kitten, the little bantam hen, and if she is reared in the country even the long-necked pumpkin, will come in for a share of her affections. Then, as she grows from childhood into girlhood and develops into womanhood, she alone knows how reluctantly those imitations are laid away; and even after the family have ceased to see them, she will steal away to their place of safe-keeping to take a look at them or rearrange their apparel. It is about this time that her heart's capacity is such as to be able to take in all babyhood, regardless of

condition or kind, and the mere sight of one of those heaven-sent blessings causes such a flood of tenderness to sweep over her heart as she could never express.

Then, as time goes on, a feeling will creep into her heart; yes, it is a yearning, sly at first—unconscious, it may be, but none the less increasing in strength and earnestness—to have a tiny form of her own flesh and blood to press to her heart.

Oh, woman, you who can not bar your heart against this longing, deign not to conceal it. It is your rightful heritage. Had not God implanted this instinct and tenderness in the feminine heart, sad indeed would be not only the advent of those little strangers into the world but thorny the paths their tiny feet must tread.

But empty, indeed, must be the heart of the woman who carries this longing through life without having felt the touch of those helpless little fingers upon the main-spring of her affections, to draw from her bosom the pent-up love and strength that she feels congealing there. For not only is it necessary to the happiness of a woman to love and be loved, but to have some being dependant upon her for comfort, some one who demands (although many times unjustly) her time, strength, and attention; for a woman's heart must be in bondage in order to be free, and the one that must exist without will reach a stunted vitality at best, then withers and dies—for many dead hearts lie buried in living tombs. But there is a home where not only the builder and foundation but the whole structure is Love and no heart will be unsatisfied.

Mary Grey sat thinking, the tears coursing their way unheeded down her cheeks. At last she aroused herself. "I must obtain more work, and stern necessity overcomes all obstacles. I will write to Colonel Wilkins today; his children are all boys, and may not object to coming to

town for their lessons. But I may be too late—it has been so long since I first heard of them; but I can but try.

“The poor are denied even the luxury of grief,” she thought, drying her tears and seating herself at her writing desk. “If I cry too much I will spoil my voice, and that is my only source of gaining a living.” And a flush crossed her face as she remembered a conversation that she had overheard between some women in the church-house. She had gone early to prayer services one Wednesday evening, and when she reached there the house was still in darkness. The door was open and she went quietly in, and unobserved, for she soon found that there were others before her.

“Do you think that she will stay here all winter?”

Those were the first words which attracted her attention, but she did not know that they were speaking of her until she heard one of them answer with spirit:

“I for one can not see what would keep her. Brother Grey has been dead over three months now, and what has kept her this long I can’t see. She surely can’t make her living by giving three lessons a week, and Sarah Green says that is all the pupils that she has. She sings like a nightingale. The poor man always thought that she was singing to him. He quite doted on her singing. It is well that he died without finding her out.”

Mary Grey could hardly believe her ears. Was it possible that they were speaking of her? Yes, there could be no mistake. The next thought was: “I am listening to what was not intended for my ears.” She had no desire to hear more, but a heavy feeling at her heart weighed her down.

“I wonder if she thinks that she can sing herself into the hearts of other men like she did into that of Brother

Grey? Poor man, she will not always be his widow. The half weeds that she is wearing for him will soon wither and be cast aside," said another.

"I know what I think," she heard the familiar voice of Mrs. Jones say, "and I don't believe I am mistaken, either. My husband told me something the other day which opened my eyes. I believe that I know why she stays here and sings like a lark, but I would not be heard repeating it for the world." And then there was a stir as if several heads were going together, and then a whisper—but it was one of those peculiar sounds that are carried farther than any loud talk. "They say that she has set her cap straight at Squire Whitby's son! and since it is a widow's cap, it surely ought to win. You know that the cottage that she lives in belongs to the old squire, and they say that he himself is losing his head about her. I would not be surprised if he left her live there rent free; and they say he comes there oftener than would be necessary if he charged her double rent! But if she is after the son, the father would not get her if he left her have the cottage for nothing and found her living besides—but there are no fools like the old ones, you know."

"The brazen thing!" said Mrs. Dixon, who had heretofore been silent. She had a daughter who was verging into womanhood, and had always looked upon Frank Whitby as a prize well worth winning. "She reminds me of a canary that I had one spring. I had made up my mind to find him a little mate. He was such a sweet singer, and I wanted to raise one to learn from him before he got too old. But the little hen bird sickened and died. While she was ailing he seemed in sore distress, flapping his little wings at her and trying to raise her with his bill. It was quite touching to see him go on so. After she was dead I thought to put a bit of crepe about his neck.

He moped until I took the little lifeless form from the cage, then flew upon his perch and sang as I had never heard him sing before. Then I thought, Hey, my fine fellow, it's little crepe that you need; so I concluded to reserve my sympathy for a more worthy object. So it is with her. When Brother Grey died, I really had it in my heart to pity her, but, like with my bird, I soon found that she would neither need nor appreciate my sympathy, but could sing as sweet as ever."

She had not stayed to hear more, but had stole quietly out and gone back home. She was not angry; her feelings were too deep for that. "I must certainly be very disagreeable to them, or they would never say such things." The idea that a company of rational beings could handle the good name of any so carelessly, simply for the enjoyment that their remarks afforded them, had never entered her mind.

"How can I act so as not to be so distasteful to the people about me? I would not have these women know that I overheard their conversation. Anything would be preferable to having them all meet me with half averted faces, as I know they would be sure to do if they found out that I had overheard their talk."

And on this morning as she sat at her desk she thought, "No wonder that I remind Mrs. Dixon of her bird, that was a good comparison," and she smiled sadly, "but I am different from the canary in one respect at least, my living depends upon my singing and it's did not. But Robert would have me be brave, and I suppose this thoughtless talk is one of the things that I will be obliged to bear."

She set herself about her task of writing, and began: "Colonel Wilkins, I am the widow of Robert Grey, late pastor of the church of this place." But the task proved

harder than she had anticipated. Before her marriage she had written such letters at different times, but it was different now. She had known for three brief years what it was to have some one to care, think and act for her, some one who had her comfort and happiness uppermost in his mind. "What will I tell him? Will I tell him that I am sorely in need of employment, almost in actual want? I am afraid that would have very little influence upon his decision. It is not our needs but our ability to fill a position that will secure it for us. But I will soon be in actual want." And allowing the thought uppermost in her mind to guide her hand, she went on: "And since his death have been thrown upon my own resources. I have been told that you wanted an instructor in music for your children, a position that I would be glad to fill; and hearing that your children were all boys, I thought they might not object to coming to town, since I have no way to come to them. Hoping that you will consider my application, and let me hear from you at once, I am, very respectfully yours."

She signed her name, and hastily inserted her letter. Then without addressing the envelope she went for her hat and started for the home of Mrs. Ferris. Ten o'clock was the time set for the daughter's lessons, and it only lacked a few moments of that time, but there were only two houses between her home and that of her pupil, and she reached the door just as the clock struck the hour.

"It is hard to tell which is the best time keeper, you or the clock," said Mrs. Ferris, who answered her ring. "My daughter has gone for a drive to the country this morning. She wanted to come past and let you know, but I told her to let you come over, it is so near, and I wanted to see you. Come into the parlor and we will have an hour's talk, and it shall be the same as if you had devoted the time to music."

"Affairs have become somewhat complicated with us. I will state the case to you, and then we will see if you could not help me out of the difficulty: My brother and his wife always spend September and October at my house. They will be here this afternoon. My sister-in-law is not strong, and requires the greatest ease and quiet. I had engaged the varnishers and paper hangers a month ago to go over the entire house. I wanted to have it all done before my company came, but the men kept putting me off from time to time, and this morning sent me word that they would be on hand to-morrow. It seems as though I was obliged to take them in their own good time, and it will take them several days. It will be a week before the house will be in a condition to accommodate any one in her state of health. Your house is so convenient and quiet. It would be a great favor to me if you could entertain them for a week or ten days. My brother always waits upon his wife when he is with her. I will send them their meals, and between us we will manage to make it as little trouble as possible to you. I would postpone the work until after their visit, but that would make it too late in the season, for she stays until the winter drives her southward and homeward. I would be so glad if you would give them shelter for the time being, and if you can make arrangements on such short notice, I will have them driven directly to your house, and your kindness shall not soon be forgotten."

"I would be glad to be of service to you in any way, and if your brother and his wife will be satisfied with the accommodations that I can give them, they will be welcome to my house. I will stay where I am until the end of the month, and a week will not interfere with any arrangements that will be necessary in order to make the change. The hospitality that I can offer them is always

in readiness, so I will be fully prepared to receive them this afternoon."

"I thank you heartily for your kindness. You speak of a change I was not aware of. I am sorry that you find it desirable to make any change. Where you live is such a nice, neat little place, that I was in hopes you liked it well enough to stay. We would be sorry to lose you from our neighborhood. I don't believe you could do better anywhere, but I suppose you do get lonely. I would have come to see you myself, and would have sent Ellen many times, had I not thought that you might prefer being alone. It is so hard to understand each other's dispositions. If our society would have been any comfort to you I am sorry that we have been so neglectful; but if you stay with us we will promise to be kind to you."

"Yes, I expect to move the last of this month. The change will be necessary. I would gladly stay where I am if I could afford it, but my earnings would not pay expenses when cold weather comes, and since I could not keep the place long I might as well give it up at once. But I will be obliged to part with some things that I will regret even more than the house. If I only rent two rooms I can not keep all my furniture, and will be obliged to sell some. Yes, I do get very lonely at times. I do not understand my own disposition, for while my heart sometimes yearns for companionship, I still shrink from the society of others. I never could succeed in making friends with many, as some people do. While I form no dislikes, I still form very few likes."

"It is only natural that you should feel that way. A sore heart is not so easily soothed, and ordinary things are so disappointing in their influence. But I would not encourage myself in being alone too much. A little

company will do you good. I hope we will be able to keep you with us. This is such a nice neighborhood to live in ; the people are so agreeable and pleasant."

"Yes, my near neighbors have shown me the greatest kindness possible. The sympathy and regard shown by their quiet, respectful manner, is a kindness that I shall never be able to forget."

It is, after all, those attentions that are too small to bear a name that arouse our hearts to the greatest thankfulness. It is the evidence of a deep regard ; a regard that will not allow its sacredness to be impaired by either doubt or questioning.

CHAPTER VII.

THE ARRIVAL.

MARY GREY was nearer to feeling cheerful after she had left the home of Mrs. Ferris than she had been since her widowhood. She had had her interest in life partially aroused. It was so long since she had met any one strange that she became almost excited over the prospect of having two in her own house. She wondered how they would look and what they would be like. Would they be pleasant? and, what was of still greater importance to her, could she succeed in making herself agreeable to them?

"My social powers are sadly in need of cultivation, but it is hard to cultivate something that you are not in possession of."

After dinner she set herself about getting her house in readiness, doing those little things which only a true housewife can find to do.

"I will have just one hour to rest," she thought, as the clock struck three; "they will not reach Cloverdale until four. I will address my letter to Colonel Wilkins and walk down to the office with it."

She was adjusting the stamp, preparatory to starting, when Mrs. Jones walked up to the open door.

"Oh, I see you are all ready to go out. Well, I will not detain you. I did not come to stay—only came over for a few moments to see how you was passing your time. I see you have been writing a letter. I can save you the trip to the office, for I am going that way and will drop it for you."

"I thank you for your kind offer, but I have an errand

that will take me down town. But you need not hurry away on that account; I need not go for half an hour or more. I will get my hat, and then we can sit down and rest a while."

"Hey! my lady," thought Mrs. Jones, as the door closed after the retreating form, "I will find out who you are writing to, that you need to be so careful. You will carry it to the office yourself, will you? but not before I have seen who it is to, if you only stay out long enough for me to find it."

But instead of having to search, the lady was surprised to see it lying on the writing desk, face upward. It was an innocent enough looking letter. She hastily put on her glasses and examined the signature.

"Colonel Wilkins!" she said aloud, in her astonishment, her eyes dilating until they were nearly as large as the glasses in her spectacles. She hastily turned it over. It was sealed. "How I do wonder what is in that letter! If I had the time and a boiling tea-kettle, I would soon find out what she is writing to him for. Still water runs deep. A person never knows to what extent the impudence and sly forwardness will carry such natures as hers. A person who does not understand human nature as well as I do might mistake her manner for modesty, but I always did know that it was nothing but pretense and deceit, and she is even worse than I took her to be. The idea of her writing to Colonel Wilkins! There are not enough men in town for her; she must try to draw some from the surrounding country—and her husband not dead four months yet! But I suppose with a woman that can't get along without a partner, one month is as good as a year. They are afraid if they don't set their traps right away some other poacher will get all the game."

She was still standing with the letter in her hand,

turning it over and over and examining it as if she expected to find something on the envelope to disclose the secret of its contents, when she heard returning footsteps. She hurriedly replaced the letter, thinking in her guilty haste, "What if she will know that I had it! Oh, dear, where was it laying? It was just about here. If I only knew whether it was laying with the stamp up or down!" She gave it several nervous little pushes, and hastily sat down in her chair by the window, feeling anything but secure against detection.

Her unsatisfied curiosity was fast gaining the mastery over her feeling of uneasiness when Mary Grey reëntered the room, and she said:

"I have had time enough to rest while you were getting ready," and she felt her courage rise at this plausible assertion, "so we might as well go."

If a guilty conscience was not such a merciless accuser all her doubts might at once have fled, for the writer of the letter, unlike any one who had been guilty of questionable conduct, walked to the desk and without glancing at the envelopes and papers gave them a shove with her right hand, while she stood facing her visitor, and said:

"I would like to have had you sit a while, but, if you must go, I am ready."

"But might she not, after all, have noticed that the letter did not lay exactly as she had left it?" thought Mrs. Jones. The nature that can not conceive of a spirit superior to its own is a sore tormentor, for it looks upon all mankind as so many enemies, who are only waiting a favorable opportunity to strike.

The thought of any one caring to interfere with her letters had never entered Mrs. Grey's upright mind, and it might have lain face down or on the other end of the table, and if any question had arisen it would have been

a doubt of her own memory and not of the integrity of her caller.

"I could have saved you this trip to the office," said Mrs. Jones, as they walked along, "but you said you had another errand; and then people don't always care for others to know who they are writing to, especially when it is to a gentleman." And she watched her companion closely to see the effects of her words.

But the little woman had been wondering what success her letter would bring her, and hardly heard what the other had said, who considered her manner as so much additional evidence against her. "She either don't care at all or else she expects to deceive me by her brazen-facedness. But she can't expect to hide such actions long. It won't be long until the whole town will know how she is carrying on—and it will be good enough for her, too. If a woman does not know how to conduct herself properly, she must expect to bear the consequences."

Mary Grey, all unconscious of what was going on in the other's mind, walked quietly by her side until they came to the office door, where they separated. "Come to see me again soon, Mrs. Jones," she said, "I shall be glad to have you call at any time."

"Hey! my pretty widow," thought that personage as she went her way, "it is very little that you care for our calls now; but the time will soon come, if I may be allowed to judge, when you would be glad to have a respectable woman to come to see you. I am afraid that you will be obliged to drop that lofty air of yours. There is one thing certain: if some of our citizens knew what I know, they would watch your actions pretty close, and I have no doubt that a great many unbecoming things would be seen. If she wanted to get acquainted with Colonel Wilkins she might have told me. I could have

managed it for her so nicely, and without casting any reflections upon her womanhood, for after all I suppose a woman has a right to get acquainted with a man if she wants to, as long as she does not want them all and goes about it in the right way. Now, I gave her all the chance in the world to tell me about that letter. If she had confided in me as one woman should in another, I would have helped her even now and without saying a word to a soul. I believe she would have told me, too, if it had been anything of the right sort. It is never a good sign for women to make too free with men, and it is not the exact thing to do, even if they mean no real harm because it will give men reason to misjudge them."

She did not stop to think that with those men that are ever ready to misinterpret a woman's conduct, it is only the natural outcome of their own vile nature, and that they are ever reaching out for any evidence that would place all womankind on a low plane with themselves; and that they were after all only judges for time and not for eternity.

Mary Grey dropped her letter and then hurried along to the store to make some small purchases. The place was filled with customers and she had to wait so long for her turn to be waited upon, that the clock struck four before she started toward her home, which she reached just as a carriage drove up to the gate.

Mrs. Ferris was the first to alight, and then she knew that her guests had arrived. She hastily unlocked the parlor door, threw down her parcels and hat, and went out to meet them. She reached the side of the carriage just as a powerful masculine figure was taking a slender girlish form into his arms and carrying her through the gate into the yard. One glance was enough to show that this was not a necessity, but from a jolly good feeling and tender care.

"There, puss," he said, putting her down on the grass, "I have carried you just half the way; I am going to make you walk the rest."

"As if I could not have walked all the way. See, sister Josephine, Fred is just as big a tease as ever. If I would let him have his way I would soon become entirely helpless."

"Well, if you two frolicsome children can assume your dignity long enough," said Mrs. Ferris, "I will introduce you to this lady, who has kindly consented to take you off my hands for a short time. This is my brother and his wife, Mr. and Mrs. Alton, Mrs. Grey. This lady's husband was our pastor."

They each offered her their hand with a cordial bow. The words "was our pastor" and the black garments caused the two city people to take in the situation at a glance, and they thought "What a pity," and she in turn stood regarding the strangers earnestly, thinking what a contrast.

The man that stood before her was six feet tall, broad-shouldered, vigorous and youthful, with a genial face and ruddy cheeks. He had dark hair, which was combed in the most boyish fashion; blue eyes and a heavy mustache which failed to conceal the smile which was continually lurking in the corners of his mouth. His face was large. He was an excellent picture of joyous and sturdy manhood. He weighed about one hundred and eighty pounds and was about thirty-five years of age.

His wife, who was standing by his side and leaning on his arm, more from habit than for support, was not above medium height, slender to thinness, with a face of the most delicate chiseling and color, light hair and blue eyes—large soulful eyes that had a habit of looking up at her husband with such utter confidence and trust that

they reflected nothing but love and a spirit of contentment. Here was a picture of frail womanhood depending upon strong manhood for support.

While the three were thus politely regarding each other, Mrs. Ferris was looking from one of the women to the other, with the same thought: "What a contrast." While her sister-in-law was a picture of such dainty trustful helplessness, Mrs. Grey was one of such self-reliance as was good to look upon. She was no taller than the other woman, but her form was well knit and perfectly rounded, with small hands and feet. She had a round face with a healthy coloring that sorrow had failed to dim; a broad forehead; a mouth that was small but firm; a rather large but well formed nose, auburn hair and hazel eyes.

After the new acquaintances had taken this momentary mental survey of each other, the hostess led the way into the cottage, where the two who were to be her temporary guests soon succeeded in making themselves at home.

Mrs. Ferris bustled about until nearly dark, hardly knowing upon which to bestow the most attention; the black-robed figure in whom she took such an interest, or her brother and his delicate wife.

"Well," she said as she started to go home, "I have stayed with you long enough for the strange feeling to wear off, and to give you a chance to make up and be friends. Mrs. Grey is not accustomed to having children about," she called back, "so you two must not become incorrigible. If they get too noisy you can send them over to my house a while each day, long enough to give you time to rest; but they had better not become too boisterous, because I really would not have time to bother with them when I am so busy. You know that troublesome children and house-cleaning are sworn enemies to

each other." With this she bade them good-night and left.

Had she been given the power to foretell results she would rather have left her house unpapered and unvarnished until the day of her death, than for those two who were so near to her by the ties of nature, to be left in the house of not only her pastor's widow, but her dear and favorite friend. But she was unable to foresee the play and final act of the drama of which she had just witnessed the opening scene.

CHAPTER VIII.

FRED. ALTON.

FRED. ALTON was a young man well suited to the life of ease into which he was born. Endowed by nature with an extraordinary degree of health and manly beauty, added to this was one of the tenderest of hearts, which manifested itself in a nature that was full of happiness but withal a kind solicitude for the whole human family. He had had the best educational advantages that wealth and leisure could procure. He had always had a fair standing in his classes, but had never made a remarkable record for himself.

"You are not the kind to set the world on fire," said his father. "I don't believe that you would succeed in any of the professions. I don't know why such natures were born into this world, unless it was to take life easy and exert their social powers; and I am afraid that I will have to take even that back, for if you hadn't been born with those gifts well matured you would not take much trouble to cultivate even them."

"No, father; I can not say that I am tormented with any particular desire to set the world on fire, or change it in any other way. It is a good enough place for me as it is—in fact, the best world that we have any assurance of. As for the professions, I don't think they are in need of any additions to the ranks of those already enlisted in their cause. The army of pettifoggers has been so extended lately that there are not only enough to mete out the decrees of justice in regulation order to the public, but quite a host left over, who are obliged to devote their time to dietetics while waiting for some one to get into

such trouble as would necessitate a call upon their superior judgment. And from the number of doctors' signs one is greeted with on every hand, a person would be led to think that one-half of the world had turned out with the determination to impair the digestion of the other half—not but what many a poor devil would be glad to have those clamorous organs of himself and family kept within reasonable bounds, if it could be done without disastrous results. As for the ministry, I don't think that I would like to be called upon to decide to the satisfaction of all my hearers as to the exact destination of their departed friends; nor would I like to think that it was through my instrumentality that so many ill-assorted couples were legalized to live together and fight it out. No; I would have too much conscience to be a minister. An addition to the clergy now and then might prove a boon to the stationer who supplies them with paper on which to write their Sunday morning sermons. I have too much conscience to disgrace any of the professions. Those who have no natural ability in any particular line need not aspire to success, for there are too many who are endowed with genius to outstrip them in the race."

So at the age of twenty-five his father had taken him as junior partner, saying: "It takes more brains to succeed in business than in any of the professions—but what else am I to do with you?" So the firm which had so long read "Alton & Co." now appeared "Alton & Son." Not that it had made any material difference in the management of the business or the life of the young man; for he had gone on being agreeable and taking life easy. His good looks, together with his amiable disposition, and his father's financial standing, had made him quite a favorite in society. His herculean strength and natural sunny temperament caused him to

assume an air of patronage which was quite acceptable to the independent and self-asserting, as well as to the timid and clinging maiden; for many masks of independence are put on not only to hide a faint and shrinking heart, but as a challenge to protection from those upon whom providence has imposed the duty of assuming the right.

Owing to the attraction of opposites, Fred. Alton was naturally drawn to the more effeminate of his acquaintances; and after he had allowed his truant thoughts to wander with a view to matrimony, they did not soar among the wealthy and intellectual, but he soon found them centered in a delicate, blue-eyed figure in his father's counting-room. This little lady had a moderate degree of intellect and originality, but not enough to make of her mind her kingdom; but since her duties did not require any superior intellectual ability, she attended to them conscientiously; and since she did not have the pluck and energy necessary to a more ambitious person to arouse her or ruffle her temper, she was a favorite among her circle of acquaintances. There was not a clerk or cashier about the place but who would have risked almost anything for a look from her eyes.

For a while after the young man had been taken as partner into his father's business he had found the store, or rather the office, a very attractive place, and devoted himself assiduously to the task of making love to the little type-writer, something to which she did not prove averse. The muscular form of the son of her employer was always welcome to her side, while he had been made captive the first time that those wonderful orbs of hers were raised to his face—those eyes which seemed to say, "Be kind to me," an unuttered entreaty to which the young man at once responded.

"A woman with a remarkable depth of thought would become tiresome to me. Such surely can not fail to be troublesome. I would rather have a clinging, womanly woman for a wife. I could conceive of nothing more exhilarating to the senses than to have such a creature look up to me for support and strength. I certainly am strong enough for two," he said, stretching his arms to their full length and viewing himself in the looking-glass; "and the man must be a brute, indeed, who would not be willing to share even less with such a being as she is to keep her from toiling for her own bread; to think, act, and live for her. I would be willing to work for her all my life, and ask for no other return than a look from those glorious eyes."

So he had taken matters into his own hands, as was his custom; and one evening, after she had completed her tasks for the day, he met her at the outer door and walked with her to her own home, where he waited in the parlor for her to exchange her working dress for a holiday attire. It was plainly to be seen that she belonged to the better class of toilers. The house in which they lived was large and comfortable and was owned by her father. They were surrounded by many of the luxuries of life, the expenses of which, however, partly fell upon her slender shoulders. The parlor was a familiar place to him—oh, yes, he had been there many times before; so he sat about making himself comfortable until she appeared, which was not long. And then, without asking the advice or consent of any one, they went in quest of a clergyman (the necessary origin, let it be for weal or woe), and were married.

They found the minister in his study. He had received a letter that day asking him to be there, as his services would possibly be required. He was not long in pronouncing the words that made those two young people supremely happy.

So instead of filling her old place at the desk, the happy little woman was soon established in one of her father-in-law's handsome houses as mistress. And from this time the store saw as little of the husband as it did of the wife. The old merchant had remonstrated at first at his son's lack of interest in the business; but it was to no avail, and he was soon left to spend his time, as he always had done, in the way which afforded him the most ease and enjoyment. This life of self-indulgence might have proved disastrous to many a stronger nature, in which power and impetuous impulse are so closely blended; but so far he had steered his sturdy bark of life free from the shoals and breakers that were making wrecks of many a promising life about him, and had sailed leisurely and serenely upon the placid waters of contentment and domestic felicity. Nothing had had the power to lure him from the side of his wife or the paths of right. But those dormant forces are sometimes like a slow, smouldering fire, gathering strength for the conflagration; or like a lowering, murky cloud on a sultry summer day, which seemed to have gained irresistible force by having been delayed.

Up to this time Fred. Alton had not been led to compare his wife with other women. She had been all that he asked for. She was loving and tender, with a loyal devotion that was humble worship. She had no existence or individuality aside from him.

This had pleased and satisfied him, and he was happy. The thought that he would ever hold her up to scrutiny had never entered his devoted head. But alas, that to all mankind should come the awakening. There is no sky so clear that it will not admit the possibility of a storm; there is no honor so closely guarded that it could not be assailed; no soul so exalted that it will not be

tried, and it is not the most important of the trials of this life that are taken into the courts. The hardest are those which are enacted in our solitary walks, or when we are alone with our thoughts, let it be in the seclusion of our chambers, or in the busy thoroughfare, with human nature as our adversary, conscience ever pleading for the right, and in which our stubborn hearts will ever be fallible judges unless we look to a divine power for guidance.

After Mrs. Ferris had gone, leaving the three together, the young man unconsciously took up the thought where she had left off. What a contrast! While his wife was a personification of ease, grace and beauty, here was a pattern of humanity of such an entirely different type that she might have belonged to a different planet; and he was surprised to find her none the less interesting.

He began by wondering how long her husband had been dead, and what he had been like; how much they had been to each other. Had he loved her as he did his wife? Was she heartbroken over his death, and how long would she mourn for him?

Nor did his interest decrease as days went by; but she was as a book to him, the pages of which had not yet been cut. They found her a kind and pleasant hostess, who tried in a quiet, unassuming way to make their stay with her as happy as possible, and by hiding her grief and assuming an air of cheerfulness, sought to add to their enjoyment.

She played and sang for them. "I must exercise this means of entertaining you, or you would find it dull indeed," she said. But the masculine eyes that were watching her could see (for men ever have and ever will pride themselves upon their insight of woman's nature) that even though there were, at times, songs upon her lips, the sorrow was never absent from her heart. It was

a strange revelation to him, that a woman could hide her grief—shut it up in her bosom, and act outwardly as if she did not know the meaning of the word, simply for the comfort of others. This was a phase of woman's nature that was new to him. He looked at his wife. Nothing had ever disturbed that little heart that did not reach to the surface in her eyes. Not a cloud had ever flitted over her horizon that was not reflected in their clear depths. "How would she ever get along without me to cling to? What would she do if I should be taken first? for she is strong in nothing but her love for me."

This thought filled his heart with a warmth and tenderness, and he clasped her to his breast, the delicate form that looked up to him so trustingly for sustenance. "My delicate little blossom. You shall never languish for the love and care that are the chief essentials to your existence," he thought. And she looked up to him as if she understood, and was satisfied.

The two women were much together, and as time went on became warm friends, while the difference grew more apparent. While one was the embodiment of a quiet dignity, strength, and self-reliance, despite her tenderness and the momentary helplessness that came into her eyes, the other was too helpless to raise a hand in the shaping of her own future, but was dependent entirely upon others for her happiness.

While Fred. Alton's wife reminded him of the most tender of vines, with no power with which to support herself, Mary Grey reminded him of a sturdy little shrub, with confidence enough in her own strength to plant herself ready to uphold those clinging tendrils.

"But it is due to her will more than to any superior muscular strength. It is remarkable how her bravery and courage help her to face the world; and I can not see

that the future holds much in store for her. I would think fate rather cruel if it had decreed that I should earn my own living. Then how must it be for a woman, and one with a proud, sensitive nature like hers? But she may marry again. It is to be hoped that she will not drag out a lonely existence for a man that is dead and gone to heaven. I believe that is where ministers are supposed to go. I wonder if he could spare the time from his flock to love her half well enough while he was here? I doubt it. They usually have their minds so fixedly upon what heaven has in store for them that they do not stop to appreciate their earthly blessings. In my opinion the whole clique of them should be treated like the priests (the Catholics are right on that point, at least), and be denied the right to have a wife, if they don't know how to treat them. And I don't believe there is one of the cloth that could do a woman like her half justice. There is a depth to her nature that would be well worth solving. What a pleasant problem it would be to one who was free to take to himself the task? And what a devoted little wife she would make for some man that was worthy of her? Not that she would be so lavish with her affections, but one look of love from her would mean much. I am almost inclined to envy the man who will, one day, inspire in her breast the love of which she is capable. Her love for a man would have a greater depth, even though she did not look up to him in such an humble, helpless way. It would be like two trees that grow so near together that their branches interlace, and although each has an independent life their shadow is cast as one. While her lofty spirit would never look up to a husband, he would not be the loser, for he would have no occasion to look down."

The young man did not realize that he was uncon-

sciously assuming the right to penetrate, if possible, the inner life of the woman who had been a stranger to him only a few days before, so he went on contrasting her with his wife in a way that was not always flattering to that little woman ; but she, unconscious of it all, returned caress for caress when he went to her in his usual way. She did not know that the profusion of her endearments would decrease their value in her husband's eyes, and that he even now compared their effect to the rapture that he felt sure the love of another would bring to him.

CHAPTER IX.

MARY GREY RELATES HER STORY.

MARY GREY did not know what was going on in the mind of the man she had taken into her home. She had taken the couple as a favor to her friend. She had thought that the most difficult part that she was to play would be the hiding of her sorrow so as to make their stay pleasant; but she had found them so genial although well bred and deferential, that she forgot herself in her duty to her guests, while in their presence. She saw in them two people that were wholly devoted to each other.

"He certainly loves his beautiful wife," she thought, "and it is well that he does. Life is empty enough to me, but what would it be for her if she did not have her husband's love to exist upon, for it certainly is the very mainspring of her life? Oh, if I can only hold out while they are here! Every soul has trouble enough of its own, without having those of others intruded upon them. Oh, if I could only creep away to the silent church-yard and lay myself by his side—or, better still, die and be buried there! Oh, how can it be sinful to long for heaven and those who have preceded you there, when they are all that you had on earth to love? There are few dissolutions of soul and body caused by broken hearts, but the living deaths are countless—deaths that must sometimes be carried through a long and weary life!

"But he would have me be brave. His God and my God will take me to Himself and to him in his own good time." And she resolved to carry out her life, might it be long or short, in a way that would meet with her husband's fullest approbation.

But the lone woman had this battle to fight over and over again. Not that she swerved from her purpose, nor that she was losing hold on her religious faith. But we must, after all, deal with our frail earthly beings and our earthly environments. Our spirits may soar above them at times. The promises that are held out in the Bible to the finally faithful, and the assurance in our own hearts that we are heirs to those promises, may carry our souls on the wings of peace. Then comes the reaction, and with a dull consciousness of pain we are brought back to earth, with all its cares, needs, and responsibilities, and we realize that though our eyes may be fixed ever so firmly upon heaven, that we have requirements while here which can not be neglected and sorrows that refuse to be soothed. And even though we recognize through it all the hand of God drawing us nearer to Himself, there are times when we are bordering upon despair and the adversary of our souls would fain say, "There is no God, for if there was one He would never treat you thus."

Although Mary Grey was above some of the petty failings of life, she was not an exalted being, and would have expressed herself as very weak indeed. We are, after all, the best witness to our own weakness. The thought of her heart quaking, instead of being proud and haughty, never entered the minds of the people of Cloverdale. But such she was. There was one who had discerned her secret, and that was the man beneath her roof.

She went about her duties the same as before their arrival. She taught her pupils, attended to her household duties, and gave such of her society to her guests as she thought would add to their enjoyment.

"I know they would rather be alone when together, sometimes. That is only natural for two people who love each other." But when the husband would leave his wife

for a time, the two women would sit together and talk and read as pleased them best.

"I will not go out, either to walk or drive, until we go up to Mr. Alton's sister's. I will reserve my strength, or I would not be able to meet the people that will be sure to call on me," said Mrs. Alton to her hostess on Sunday morning, when she had asked if she and her husband would accompany her to morning services.

"It is not far, and the walk might do you good. Nothing revives me so much when I am tired and depressed."

"I am neither tired nor depressed," said the other, "but I simply have not the strength. I wish I had your strength or will-power, or whatever it is that you have that I have not. I envy you. I am surprised to hear you talk of weariness or depression. I would never have guessed it. Do you know it makes me ashamed of myself every time I look at you, and makes me think that my weakness may, after all, be due to a lack of energy. But I have been so happy since I am married. My husband has spoiled me. He is so strong, and persists in taking care of me as if I were a helpless child. I tell him that he does that to keep his strength from running riot; but I am such an indolent creature that I do not care to have it otherwise. Oh, no," laughed the happy little woman, "I am more than satisfied as it is."

She received no answer, and not noticing the tears that were welling up in the eyes of her companion, she went on:

"Do you know, I am so well satisfied with my husband's company that I could almost dispense with all others. It seems that if all well-assorted people could be left to themselves to enjoy each other's society, we would be a much happier people. Among the many burden-

some things that the so-called social world has decreed, the one that is most tiresome to me is the making of formal calls. Which do you find the most burdensome, Mrs. Grey?"

"My experience of fashionable city life is limited, but the word formal always suggests something hollow or unreal to me. It has never been my good fortune to make acquaintances or friends readily, and I am afraid pretences would be anything but becoming to me. My social powers would be sadly deficient if I should try to extend them beyond a very few friends. You spoke of indolence. I lay claim to a full share of that quality, or lack of quality, and you will not wonder when I tell you that I do not even care to exert myself to be agreeable. Not that I lack in kindly interest or but what I try to avoid being disagreeable, but I am too indifferent to act in a way that would help me to form lasting acquaintances. Life has been too real, too earnest, to act anything but my own natural part, and the question to me is, do such things, after all, add to our happiness? Has the power been given to any of us to be so lavish and far-reaching with our attentions and friendship with any degree of genuineness? Since it has been denied to me, I find it not only more satisfying to my conscience, but equally more in accordance with my idle tastes, to reserve my civilities for the few that might possibly be benefitted or made happier by them, even if in so doing I must necessarily deny myself a wider circle of acquaintances."

"It certainly could not fail to be a happier world if we were all more considerate of the feelings of those with whom we are closely associated, but too many sacrifice even the happiness of those who love them to widen their social influence. Too many people who are not even endowed with the power, or do not care to make their own

families happy, carry their influence into a wider circle, where their sincerity will not be questioned. In so-called society people do not even ask for, much less expect, sincerity, and if you have never been called upon to take part in the formalities that are robbing so many homes of their sacredness by denying the heart all that makes life worth living—out-spoken, heart-felt sympathy and love—you have been far more fortunate than you know. The dictates of fashion have so frowned upon the manifestation of any inward feeling that would suggest the presence of a heart, that it could not fail to make life an empty farce. I tell my husband that we can never become truly fashionable, because I can never quite succeed in hiding my love for him; and since you have been shut up in a little world of your own, and have been too indifferent (as you express it) to explore its wider areas, I will let you into a few of its secrets. So-called society will bring contentment, much less happiness, to none, and it is only astonishing to see how many are keeping up the farce. People with the bitterest enmity in their hearts will smile and fawn upon each other when they meet, or, what is still worse, will seek each other out—only, the next moment, if an opportunity presents itself, to strike them a blow from which they or their good name may never recover, or at best drop their mask of smiles with their farewell courtesy and clinch their fists and stamp their feet if the lady upon whom they have called seems to be more fortunate in the possession of this world's goods; but at their next meeting the mask is again in its place."

"I am afraid," said Mary Grey, "that I would be a sad failure in this world of etiquette, for my training has been contrary to its requirements. My parents taught me to abhor the shams of life, and I am afraid that I have done such credit to their teachings that I do not even possess

the charity that I should for the failings of others, and I fear that is even a greater fault, for so long as we have shortcomings of our own we should make ample allowance for those of others. Circumstances also have much to do with the forming of our characters. I have always been too busy with the serious problems of life to pay much attention to non-essentials. After being surrounded by the strictest home discipline until I was sixteen, my parents died. Luckily, they left me sufficient means to take such training in music as enabled me to earn my living in that way, even if the fashionable world would be too busy to receive their attentions. I taught music until I was married, and then, although my husband would no longer allow me to give lessons, I was still leader of the choir, and gave the young people all the assistance I could in the improvement of their voices. And then there were so many ways in which I could be of assistance to my husband that the three years of my married life were really the busiest of all. I tell you this that you may know that life to me has been no idle dream, but an earnest reality. The time that my husband and myself could spare from our labors and duties we devoted to each other—but if he had only been spared to me, I would willingly sacrifice every moment of my life for the good of others! He was so grandly good and noble, and we were so happy!"

This was the first time that Mary Grey had mentioned her married life or her husband to her guest. It was a revelation to her. Could this quiet, submissive creature be suffering so intensely? Her loving little heart went out to her hostess with a bound, and before that lady had completed her pathetic story her arms were tightly clasped about her neck. She drew her sorrowing head into her lap, and sat caressingly stroking her brown hair.

"Oh, why should human hands be so powerless in the alleviation of pain and suffering? What would I not give at this moment for the power to sooth you? But I know that if I were in your place words would only be a mockery. But believe me, my heart is bleeding for you," she said, tenderly.

"Mrs. Grey, you are a better Christian than I am. Promise to help me pray daily that God may spare me the pain of such an ordeal. Help me to pray that I may be taken first. Think what I would be were I in your place. I would never be able to bear up as you do."

By this time the blue eyes had a look in them that could only be more despairing were her husband really to be taken from her, and it would have been hard to tell which was shedding the most tears, they or the brown ones.

Fred. Alton found them crying in each other's arms when he opened the door from an adjoining room. He had overheard their talk from the very beginning. At first he listened with indifference. He heard his wife speak of her weakness. That was a familiar subject to him, but for the first time it fretted him just a little to hear her refer to it, and he thought, "What would I not give at this moment to have you strong, more like some one else." Then he heard her speak of her affection for him. "Another familiar subject," he thought; but at this his heart went out to her in answering love. "Dear little heart," he said to himself, "the man would be a hound indeed who would wilfully cause you one pain." Then came her views upon society. He never had heard her express herself so strongly upon any subject, and he wondered. "I would never ask for her oath to convince me that she enjoyed my society more than any one's else." Then he heard Mary Grey answer, and in doing so give

some of her views of life. He felt his interest aroused. This was what he had been wishing for: an opportunity to find out something about her nature, and here he could judge from her own words. She expressed herself in such a simple, straightforward way that his admiration increased with his wonder. "The fact that the so-called world has had little to do with the formation of your character is your chief attraction," he thought. "No; pretenses would not be very becoming to you. Poor little woman; a person seldom finds such modesty combined with courage and bravery like hers. If that minister had known what he would miss in this world by leaving it, he would have been sorry to go, even if it were to a better place, and would have prayed for permission to stay, if for no other reason than to keep some one else from stepping into his shoes—a thing some fellow is bound to do."

Then he heard more in his wife's voice. "No need of your distressing yourself upon that subject, my little pet; you certainly have never been slack in your duty to me, and always showed your attachment at the risk of ridicule."

He smiled good-humoredly when she offered to let the other into the secrets of her life. "I will bet that new cigar case of mine that Mary Grey has more practical knowledge of life now than that little wife of mine has or ever will have." But he was still more surprised as she went on. "So you think all other society but that of your husband is composed of deceit? Well, it is to be hoped that will never play a part in his attentions to you."

Then came the story of Mary Grey's early life, and he drank in every word eagerly. "Not a very easy life; and just as I thought, that devout Christian did not lessen her burdens, but only added to them. I can see that plain enough, even if she does imagine that he made her happy."

"So my wife has turned comforter," he thought, when

he heard her kind voice. "Well, she is not so bad at it, after all." But soon a broad smile spread over his face, when he heard her appeal to the woman in trouble to help her pray that she might never have a similar trial. Had it not been that his own heart was touched, he would have laughed outright; but instead, he walked in and feigned a polite degree of surprise.

Mary Grey drew herself gently from the arms of her friend, and with a whispered "Thank you" and a grateful look in her eyes she left the room, and was soon on her way to church, and, as the woman had expressed it, to sing like a nightingale.

After the door had closed upon her retreating form, the young man drew his tearful wife tenderly to his side and teasingly said: "So the little woman turned consoler? But a sorry one she would make, as long as she tries to cheer the hearts of others by drawing their minds to the possibility of a similar catastrophe in her own life. What a great philosopher she is, after all!"

"Fred. Alton, how dared you listen to a story that was not intended for your ears? You know very well that she never would have told the story she did had she known that you were listening. I would be ashamed, if I were you!"

"Yes, but I have heard two stories, and since I figured somewhat in the one, I think I had a right to hear it—even if it was not such a great revelation to me."

"But if you go on eavesdropping and persist in teasing me, I may feel called upon to take some of it back. The fact that a woman loves a man when she thinks him all that she would have him to be, is no assurance, you know, that she can not change when she discovers him to be otherwise."

"So I will have to be on my good behavior or I will

forfeit the good opinion of my little wife! I did not know she was so exacting. But that was not such a bad conversation to hear. It proved to me that one little woman has a tender heart. As if I needed any such proof!" he went on, caressingly. "But if you promise me a lofty and lasting place in your esteem, I in turn will promise to do better in future. But do not tell Mrs. Grey that I heard her. It really was not very manly, and she would not be pleased; she is so reserved, and is not one to hold up her life before the eyes of others, neither to win sympathy nor for any other cause. But it is needless to mention this; my little wife's judgment is not amiss respecting the feelings of others, and she has never yet betrayed any of her husband's bad traits."

"The reason she has not made known your faults is because she has not discovered them—or not until today, at least; but you had better be careful how you reveal them to her, or she might prove to be a more effective traitor than consoler," and she looked up at him archly.

"The idea of my little pet turning traitress against her husband!" and he laughed heartily.

So they talked on, like two happy children, while their hostess was wending her way slowly toward the place of worship.

CHAPTER X.

SHOULD SHE BE ALLOWED TO REMAIN IN CHURCH.

MARY GREY delayed her footsteps so that the cool morning air might soothe her swollen eyes, and that she might be enabled to quiet her emotions. "I should not have given way this morning," she thought. "I don't know how I will be able to sing, but I could not help it and it would have been all the same had I ruined my voice. Their happiness keeps the memory of my own married life constantly before me. Yes, I will join my prayers to her's that she may never be left a widow as I am, with her heart shorn of its love and its life."

By this time she had reached the church, and without noticing the eyes that were turned upon her she took her place in the choir, and soon her voice had helped to fill the little chapel with sacred music.

Like the notes of the bird that thrill so sweetly while the little songster is mourning for its mate, so the music made by human lips is not always a token of a light and care-free heart, but song sometimes seems as if it took the weight from our hearts and carried it away on its notes, and left hope and comfort in its stead.

So by the time that the services were concluded the feeling of sorrow and weariness had given place in her heart to one of peace and rest. She did not stop to talk to any one, but walked quickly down the aisle and out into the open sunshine. A spirit of gladness and thankfulness came over her that flooded her whole being with its light. Youthful life was after all in itself a pleasure. There was much to be thankful for, and was it not after all a part of her duty to her God, not only to bear sub-

missively the bereavement that He had seen fit to send upon her, but also to enjoy life and the many blessings that she received from His hand?

She thought about her guests as she hurried home. "I am so glad that they are happy; I am so glad that there is much happiness in the world after all. I must not shut myself up because I have no joys of my own, but must take comfort from those of others. But oh," and all the sad memories came rushing back, "if only my husband had been allowed to stay with me! what would I not have been willing to bear? I am so helpless and so cheerless alone. O death, thou art so hard, so cruel and relentless!"

She did not know that there is a bereavement even worse than death; when the affections reach out with all their strength and power and no longer excite an answering throb; when the love of that one who has sworn allegiance has grown cold or gone out to another, and the heart is allowed to famish although surrounded by those who should furnish its sustenance. And how many there are who might well cry out, "Oh, the extreme nothingness of nothing!" for there are thousands who are born a loveless birth, live a loveless life, and die a loveless death, who have never had a kindness or attention shown them from the cradle to the grave, only such as are actuated by a sense of duty or of gain. What is a barren waste or the desert of Sahara compared to such a life?

Had Mary Grey's mind been such as would have made it possible for one thought to enter that she might be the cause of one strong man to fight the battle of right and wrong; that she might arouse in him a feeling the depth of which had never yet been fathomed by his beautiful, trusting wife, she would have fled to the ends of the earth rather than to remain and permit it. But, alas, we are

none given the power to penetrate the future, and she went back to the man who was a creature of boyish impulse, and had never known the denial of a wish. Had she known that he had overheard their conversation, her own high sense of honor, together with her innate reserve, might have caused her to avoid him, but unconscious of the fact she joined them at once, and he had an opportunity to keep up the study which was becoming more and more agreeable.

"What a remarkable woman she is," he thought; "I know that she sang this morning, and it would have taken most women with a lesser grief longer than that to quiet their sobs and dry their tears."

The most of the congregation followed Mrs. Grey's example by filing quietly out and starting for their homes, but there were three who seemed to have something on their minds and appeared to be waiting for each other. I will have to take my readers back over the events of the preceding chapter to explain the cause of their perturbation.

The next morning after the strangers had arrived at the home of Mrs. Grey, Mrs. Jones had called upon Mrs. Dixon in great excitement, and when invited to be seated exclaimed:

"Oh, no! I have not a minute to spare: but my mind is so disturbed that I thought I would just have to run over! I can't think of anything else! What is this world coming to, when a widow, and a minister's widow at that—one whose husband is hardly cold in his grave, and whose tracks could still be found in the door-yard—acts like she does? I say it is a disgrace to the town, to society, and to the church!"

"Well, how will I know what to think unless you tell me what you mean? What has the broken-hearted widow

been guilty of now? I would not be surprised if she had taken her pick and choice of all the good-looking men in town and made good her escape with him."

"Oh, no; no such good news as her making her escape! She will be the cause of a big scandal before she leaves us. There is a strange man hanging around her house now! My husband saw him last night as he was passing. He said he saw him come out of the door as unconcerned as you please. He looked around, and went in again before his very eyes; and as much as he could see in the dark, he was a large, nice-looking man. And he had no sooner gone back into the house than my lady was singing to him!"

"I will warrant that he would have to be nice-looking; she would have no other kind," said Mrs. Dixon. "And as for her singing, I always did think that her voice was a power from the evil one; but to think that she would use it one day to lure men into her web, and then the next day have the audacity to sing in our choir!"

"Well, that is exactly what I was thinking about. I was so worried about it that I could not think to stop to do any of my morning's work, but came right over. I think it is our duty as members of the church to notify the official board and have some strenuous measures taken at once. One such a woman is enough to pollute a whole congregation, and we can not afford to risk our daughters to her influence. Here comes Sarah Green—don't say a word, and we will see if she has heard the news; but trust her to know everything that is going."

"Good morning," said that young lady; "what a lovely morning! What a pity it is to have so much sin going on in our midst on such a day as this. Can it be possible that you have not heard the shameful news?" she went on, as the two wary matrons persisted in dis-

cussing their last canning experience. "There was a man at Mrs. Grey's last night. He stayed there until after eleven o'clock, and must have been there all night, for no one saw him come away. If no one else investigates this matter, I will take it into my own hands. I will see if she sings in the choir, holds up her head above respectable, virtuous people, and harbors men in the dead of night at the same time! I think that when there is such proof of guilt, it is high time for the church to rid itself of such a character!"

"Oh, yes, Miss Green, we know there was a man at the bewitching widow's house last night," said Mrs. Dixon, in her old provoking way; "but he was such a nice-looking one, large and handsome, such a one as even you would hardly be proof against, and really, we should consider all the facts in the case before we pass sentence."

"I don't know what the man's looks has to do with the woman's shameful conduct!" exclaimed Miss Green, indignantly. "If I was not so accustomed to your insults I would never come near you. If you persist in defending a character of that sort, it is nothing to me; but I know that I never could be induced to attend services in the same house with her, and if she is allowed to continue going there I shall stop at once."

"We agree with you," said Mrs. Dixon; "her conduct must be looked into, but as a kindness to you we married ladies will take it upon ourselves. People might say that you was jealous if they were to hear you say anything about widows and their beaux. Mrs. Jones and I will ferret this thing out, and if the widow can be gotten rid of, away she goes—and it would be to the satisfaction, no doubt, of every girl or single woman in town."

"Yes," said Mrs. Jones, "it is our duty to society and to the church to help keep them free from all demoraliz-

ing influences; but we had better not take any decided step until after next Sabbath. We had better wait and see how she conducts herself, or if she comes to services at all, and that will give us a chance to watch her house the next four days. Since Miss Green has acquaintances in the neighborhood, she might be excellent help to us. She can manage to get herself invited to spend a night at their house, and then watch the doors and windows of the whilom widow Grey. She will be apt to be pretty cautious, and may take close watching. Your friends need not know that you went to watch any one," she said, turning to Miss Green.

"I can't see what more proof you want. You say your husband saw the man go in and out of her door; but I will watch. She can never say that he was a brother or a relative, for there would be a dozen witnesses that she said she had no relatives living. We would never accept the cousin dodge."

So after Miss Green had been appointed and accepted the duties of sentinel, she and Mrs. Jones took their leave. They had all three agreed to await further developments, watch her face closely Sunday morning, and compare impressions and discoveries after services.

So on that day, after they had joined each other, they walked slowly down the street together. Miss Green, who could not control her outraged sensibilities until the crowd were out of hearing, whispered:

"Now, what do you think of that for brazen impudence? I saw the man with my own eyes; and then she dares to show her face among a God-fearing people and in his own house! Did you notice that guilty look on her face? I have no doubt in my mind that the man is still there, and that she is hurrying home to him."

"So you really saw him! I wonder who he is and

where he is from. Some old beau, no doubt; but I don't care who he is, he is there for no good. Was he so very good-looking? But I don't suppose you have ever paid enough attention to the other sex to notice that there is any difference in them, have you, Miss Green?"

"Mrs. Dixon, if I were you I would try to stop my insinuations long enough to use my tongue for a sensible purpose once in a while! Are you ready now to notify the official board, or do you still want more proof of her disgraceful doings?"

"I for one," said Mrs. Jones, "believe we had better appoint ourselves as a grievance committee of three and go and talk to her. We might be better able to point out to her the sinfulness of her ways. Those official boards never do know how to deal with a female sinner, and I don't believe in throwing the weak masculine sex into temptation's way. Even those old gray-haired pillars of the church might not be proof against being smitten by her charms. In endeavoring to discharge my duty, I have come in contact with so many kinds of people that I think I will be able to deal with this case of misdemeanor."

"A capital idea!" replied Mrs. Jones. "I never thought of that; but you are always so far-sighted that I am proud of you. But when will we call on her to discharge this duty? The sooner we attend to it the better it will be for the morals of the whole town—and how cautious we should be of the very appearance of evil! What do you say to tomorrow forenoon? We will be apt to find her at home then. We usually wash on Monday, but I can put that off until Tuesday when a duty stares me in the face."

After deciding upon Monday as the time for their visit, they separated, Mrs. Jones highly pleased with herself and the world. The honor of being crowned sovereign appeared as nothing in comparison to being considered a

wise counselor in the small affairs of her neighbors. The comfort that she derived from this source was gratifying in the extreme, and from the weight of her position she felt called upon to be very severe at times in her judgment. She felt that her wisdom should not be questioned owing to any leniency that she would show in this case. She felt that the woman had been guilty of wrong-doing, and she would pronounce her verdict unhesitatingly.

Had those worldly-wise women acted upon their first conclusion and laid the matter before the official board, it might have made the duty which they had taken upon themselves so unflinchingly entirely unnecessary. Mr. Ferris was a member of that august body, and would have been able to give a satisfactory answer to any questions that they might feel called upon to ask regarding the propriety of Mrs. Grey's visitor.

But they had decided otherwise. They thought that if they took her unawares and told her plainly that they knew her guilt, she would certainly be led into making a confession, and they even went so far as to picture her down on her knees begging for mercy. But they would be unflinching. She had done wrong, and could not avoid the consequences. She must at once drop out of the choir and out of the church. The fact that her husband had been pastor there once would not help her, and she had better go some place where she was not known and begin life over again. And Mrs. Jones had decided upon quite a number of edifying and admonitory phrases to deliver for the spiritual good of the culprit.

CHAPTER XI.

THE LADIES OF THE CHURCH VISIT MRS. GREY.

THIS part of the program might have been carried out admirably had it not been for a pair of small ears that were ever on the alert—ears that had been listening eagerly ever since his visit to the home of Mrs. Grey, when he had been sent there to deliver his mother's message, and that lady had captivated his boyish heart by her sweetness.

"I promised that I would tell her if I heard them talking about her again. I am so glad that I listened last night when they thought I had gone to bed. Never mind, my lady, if you are an expert at boxing boy's ears and carry the key to the pantry in your pocket, we have a chance to get even once in a while. When we boys have any secrets to talk over or any plans to lay, we can go to the stable mow or sit on the back alley fence. Now, that would not be becoming to your dignity and might be hard on your frocks. I am so glad that the style for boy's to wear pants never changes, or we would have to be so stiff and careful, and do all our talking on the parlor sofa on Sunday evenings, where our sisters could hear everything. I don't think it would be worth while to be a boy if they heard all we say. We catch it often enough as it is, but laws how mad they would be if they heard us read their pedigrees sometimes. But we go where no one can hear us but Billy and Sooky, and they belong to the respectable class that don't gossip nor tell tales.

"Aha, Miss Sis, I was thinking about that last time you boxed my ears after I had gone to bed, when I was listening under the parlor window. So you may know I

took in about all that you said, and I think I will be able to tell Mrs. Grey the gist of the conversation. I will tell her that you expect to call on her about 10 A. M. Then she can prepare for your visit by hiding herself or locking the door, if she don't care to be at home to you."

So after much soliloquizing the boy presented himself at Mrs. Grey's door at an early hour, and on being invited to enter he stepped in, hat in hand. He was eager to take revenge on his sister for exercising her authority over him in a manner not congenial to his comfort or peace of mind. Then who had a better right to know things about people than they did themselves? But when he stood before the lady to whom he had so much to impart, his ideas were all in such a jumble that he did not know where to begin his story, so he said:

"I heard my sister say that her, Mrs. Jones and Mrs. Dixon were coming to see you this forenoon, so I thought I would come and tell you, because most people like to know when they are going to have company, and if I was in your place I would hide before they got here, because I heard them say as how they will be able to make you cringe. They say that a man has been seen about your house. Mr. Jones saw him first, then my sister watched and saw him, too, and they have made up their minds that it is their Christian duty to come and tell you that it is not becoming for a woman who has no male protector to harbor a man in her house in the dead hours of the night. They said that you had better have your mind on the poor dead man that is laid away in the lone cemetery, than to be disgracing your sex with your conduct. My sister said that if you did not step down and out of the choir and out of the church she would do so herself. Oh, they will make you feel awful bad if they get a chance! So if I was in your place I wouldn't let them

in, I wouldn't care if it was the truth or not. I promised that I would tell you if I heard people say things about you, but this was the first time I had a chance to hear them, so I came and told you; but I don't believe a word they said."

"It gets little boys into no end of trouble to listen when big folks are talking and then tell what they hear, so you had better not risk it again. But what you heard them say is true; there has been a man staying here for nearly a week. Mr. Alton and his wife are boarding with me. Mr. Alton is Mrs. Ferris' brother. His wife is not strong and does not go about, so of course people have had no chance to see her."

The boy's eyes opened with surprise; then a thought seemed to strike him. "But if his wife is with him it is safe and sound to have him about, and all proper and right and no harm done."

"No, Tommy, there is no harm done; but it is a pity that people were led into making the mistake. You can tell them how it is, then they need not take the trouble to call this morning, unless they care to. You will tell them, won't you?"

"Oh, yes; of course I will tell them," he thought, as he left the house, after catching a glimpse of the strangers through an open door. "It will be better than any other kind of good time to get to tell them. Won't they be mad when they find out through me that there is no use for that visit, and won't I tell how genteel they are and that they are from the city?"

"But if I tell them they will know that I was there. I guess maybe I had better not tell, after all. It would be running risks, but I could tell them that I was passing and saw them through the window or out in the yard."

As he was trying to decide what line of action would

insure him the greatest safety (to hide his own actions seemed of the greatest importance just then) a new thought seemed to come to him :

"I won't tell them at all, but just let them go there and find out for themselves. It will make them feel pretty mean and sneaking, but it will serve them right. Let them mind their own business, and mebbby it will be a lesson that will stick, as Sis says to me sometimes." He could have hugged himself with delight at the thought. "It will be enough to take the sass out of Sis for a month. If I would only dare to tell her then that I knew all about it! I wish I was little enough to hide in a crack somewhere, so I could see and hear the whole performance. I think if I was in their place I would step down and out of existence if I made such a fool of myself. I am so glad that some others besides boys get themselves into scrapes sometimes."

His jubilant spirits knew no bounds when, from his perch on the alley fence, he saw the trio depart a few hours later.

"I am so glad," said Mrs. Jones, "that I happened to think of us going to see her ourselves. I believe in disposing of any one like her as quietly as possible, and I think that I will be directed to talk to her in a way that might yet help her to turn back; but she will have to go where she is not known, for when a woman once gets herself talked about she is gone, even if there is no truth in the stories—and I guess there is no lack of evidence in this case. My mind is made up on one thing: she will have to leave this town; and if there are too many attractions here for her to leave willingly, we will manage or I will see to it that she goes anyway. I do not believe in performing a duty or doing anything by halves. But I hope we won't have any trouble with her. It would be

too bad if we did, since she is our dead pastor's widow. Oh, no! of course we could not afford to make any allowance on that account. It would not be becoming to us sisters of the church if we did not perform our duty to the letter, no matter how much unprofessors may shirk their responsibilities."

By this time they had reached their destination, Mrs. Jones, as village oracle, taking the lead. She succeeded admirably in concealing what degree of trepidation she may have felt, and after assuming the air of bravery and fortitude that she thought the occasion demanded, she stepped to the door and rang the bell.

Mrs. Grey, somewhat surprised, admitted them. She had hoped that Tommy's story would prevent their coming. What would her guests think if they knew that she was suspected of wrong-doing? Might it not cast a reflection upon her former conduct? She recoiled with repugnance from the very thought of being either watched or mistrusted by any one; but the thought of those pleasant strangers hearing of it sent a thrill of horror through her heart, and she only hoped to be able to get rid of her callers without any of their talk being overheard.

But Mrs. Jones had determined that if there was a man in the house, as she fully believed, he should also get the benefit of her superior wisdom and excellent judgment; and after all, he needed to be admonished and warned as well as she. Of course he was not to blame, but—no, she would not even spare him. She would talk loud enough so that he could not fail to hear her. So she began in a high-pitched voice, which penetrated to every part of the little cottage:

"Mrs. Grey, it is in discharge of a very painful duty that we are here this morning, and I devoutly hope that we may not be too late; that you may still—"

But how she would have further delivered herself will never be known, for at that moment the parlor door opened and the stalwart form of a man—yes, it was a man, sure enough—stepped into the room; but by his side was a beautiful lady. The man, after looking from one to the other of the grievance committee with an eye that bid fair to quell stronger hearts than they possessed, turned kindly toward Mrs. Grey, saying :

“I hope you will forgive me when I tell you that I overheard what took place in this room this morning. I could not well avoid it. I heard every word that the boy said. Yes,” he said to the women, “we were made aware of your intended visit and the nature thereof.” Then turning to Mrs. Grey again, he went on: “I was only withheld from coming in and choking the youngster by my desire to find out to what depth human nature will drag those who give themselves up to its weaknesses, and I hope,” he went on kindly, “that you will also pardon the liberty I am taking now.”

To the nonplussed and now thoroughly uncomfortable women he said: “My wife and I have been waiting for your arrival, and only hoped that you would not forego your visit, that we might have the opportunity to make an explanation—one that would be justified by even your strict sense of propriety—and thereby spare our kind hostess an interview that could not fail to be as painful and humiliating to her as it would be shameful and degrading to you. My wife and I are boarding with Mrs. Grey; have been for nearly a week. I am a brother of Mrs. Ferris. She is having some remodeling done on her premises, and this lady, who is a very dear friend of my sister’s, has kindly consented to take us in until her house shall be in a condition for her to entertain my wife, who is not strong; and hoping that this explanation will

prove satisfactory to your righteous minds, we will all bid you good morning."

It would be utterly useless to try to describe the feelings of the would-be counselors as they took their leave with shame and indignation blended on their faces. They had been coolly bidden to depart without having the opportunity to say one word that might justify their conduct in the eyes of her whom they had wronged. They had been brow-beaten by the very man whom Mrs. Jones had hoped to condemn by his own conduct. But their feeling of shame soon gave way to that of resentment, and Mrs. Jones began in a voice in which there was a perceptible decrease of self-confidence, a fact which her bravado failed to conceal.

"I don't care, it is good enough for her! It is her own fault!"

Oh, no! they would not admit, not even to themselves, that they were the objects of commiseration, that they were worsted in the combat, but she went on, coaxing as much of the spirit of genuineness into her voice as possible:

"If she had acted as any woman ought, as a sister of the church should, she would have told me that she was about to take some boarders. Why, I was there the very afternoon they came, and she did not even tell me. It would have saved all this mistrust and all this trouble to us. It is no small matter to me to take the burden of the wrong-doing of the church upon my shoulders. What a lot of trouble it would save, and how much better people would understand each other, if they were not so selfish. A little confidence now and then would be such an insurance against wrong impressions. I don't mean that people should tell their affairs to everybody, but only to such as they could trust and who might be able to advise

them. She might have told me that morning that she was expecting strangers, just as well as not; then we would have known that it was all right, and might be at home attending to our home duties, instead of bothering ourselves in trying to benefit others."

That withheld confidence, upon the part of Mrs. Grey, was an insult to Mrs. Jones to which she could not well resign her wounded sensibilities; a deep-rooted wrong of that sort she could not reconcile herself to.

"He was a splendid-looking man," said Mrs. Dixon to Miss Green, after they had been left alone together. "I am almost sorry that Mr. Alton has a wife, although it would be the ruin of Mrs. Grey if he had not. I am so thoughtful for you, my dear, that I would almost see people's good name sacrificed on your account. I know that if he was a single man, he could not fail to succumb to your girlish charms. I know if I were a man I should not be long in discovering them."

"Mrs. Dixon, don't talk to me about the men! The whole lot of them are brutes! Don't talk to me about a man that would stand up and treat well-meaning ladies like that one did us! What right had he to act with such authority in her house if there is nothing between them? I would like to see a man assume the right to insult my friends in my own house, and that man the husband of another! The simple fact that he has a wife makes matters appear all the worse in my eyes!"

"And," she continued under her breath, "the fact that we failed to catch her this time makes me all the more determined to hound her down."

Nothing but the direst revenge would appease the wrath caused by the humiliation to which she had been subjected. It had all been so different from what she had expected. She had thought to get rid of the woman,

whom she now thoroughly hated, and instead a stranger had insulted her, and in defense of that despised person.

"Mrs. Dixon," and she turned almost fiercely to her companion, "I wonder who told them that we were coming! I shall find out if it costs my very life, and then the little wretch shall suffer, I don't care who he is, not only for carrying the news to her, but for not telling us the truth, for he certainly must have found out before he left who her boarders are."

But not wishing that Mrs. Dixon should see any greater manifestation of her temper, she left her and entered her home, now thoroughly aroused.

CHAPTER XII.

AN OFFER OF A HOME.

AFTER the departure of the three women Fred. Alton stood for a moment quietly regarding the face of Mrs. Grey, upon which was depicted such utter humiliation, but this look gave place to one of gratitude as she looked from him to his wife—a look of gratitude blended with pain.

He began, "Mrs. Grey, do not think for a moment that we do not realize the extent of the liberty that we have taken. I say we, for I found a ready accomplice in this little woman. But we were made unwilling listeners this morning, the door leading from the parlor to the veranda being open. We would have closed it, but the boy had only said a few words until it was plain that you were in trouble, and that we were the cause of it, and remembering the circumstances under which you took us into your home, we did not think it a violation of principle to listen to the end and see in what way we might be able to spare you. Believe me, it was only through the depth of the regard that we feel for you that we were led to do what must appear to you to be dishonorable in the extreme.

"For our present conduct I will offer no excuse, but will make a confession instead. It was a conspiracy—what the courts call a premeditated offense—so of course we can hope for no leniency. I will own (although it is not a tribute to human nature) that it afforded me a great deal of personal satisfaction to have the opportunity to administer to those women what they justly deserved."

"You must not blame my husband for what he has just done," said Mrs. Alton. "It was my fault. I planned

this little drama, in which he obliged me by kindly consenting to take the leading part. Believe me, we did it through consideration for you, and if we have acted unwisely I hope you will forgive us. The head will sometimes err, even though the heart be in the right. Say that you will forgive us, and we will not be sorry that we were the means of terminating their visit in a way that they will not soon be able to forget."

"I can not but feel the deepest sorrow that this should have happened," said Mrs. Grey with a look of despair in her eyes; "that you should be annoyed by an occurrence of this kind while guests under my roof. I would rather have spared you all knowledge of it, had it been in my power, but I do not question your motive and only hope that I fully appreciate your kindness, for which you have my heartfelt thanks. I am poor defense in trials of this kind, but I must ask you not to be too severe in your judgment of those women. They no doubt thought it to be a duty, and I am only sorry that I did not avoid this by telling Mrs. Jones that you were coming. She had only been gone a short time when you arrived. I may be at fault by being so reticent, but it is my nature, if that is any excuse."

"I have no doubt," said Mr. Alton, "that some women, and men too, as far as that is concerned, train themselves into the belief that it is in discharge of duty that they cause so much misery in this world by their restless tongues, but it is a libel upon the face of God's truth to say that duty calls upon any one to do aught but attend strictly to their own business. God never intended us to be each other's keeper, and we cannot attempt to do this in the slightest degree without violating His laws, for which offense no judgment or punishment would be too severe in my eyes. Do not blame yourself for your

reticence. It is only natural for well-bred people to be as quiet about their own affairs as they are indifferent about those of others, no matter how much natures of a certain kind may clamor for a close account of private proceedings."

The genuine sympathy of her guests took the poisoned sting out of Mary Grey's heart, but the wound to her pride remained. Her friends, whose regard she held in highest esteem, had felt it their duty to come to her assistance. They had been led to act in a way that could not have been otherwise than distasteful to them, even though Mr. Alton's gallantry had prompted him to try to make it appear otherwise. She had been mistrusted of wrong doing. How she recoiled from the thought! She had rested in the belief that a good character and a clear conscience would serve as a sort of shield against unjust implications, but she had found that they served as naught in the common verdict, and that no matter how unimpeachable a life had been, there was an under-current sentiment that was willing to drag it, upon the least pretext, upon the scales of their opinion.

What should she do? How should she act in future? As stoutly as her heart had always rebelled against the thought of their rights as critics, she felt that she must in safety to herself guide her actions in such a manner as to keep them within the limits of their laws. Poor soul, it is well that she did not know how utterly impossible this was, or her courage would have failed her—that courage which was to be so sorely tried. She would not keep the cottage, would not even try to keep it any longer. What pleasure would there be in so doing if she was to be watched like a convict out on parole? And then she had as yet received no answer to her letter of application to Colonel Wilkins, and even if that should

prove in her favor, it was necessary to lay something by for the future. "I can not always go on this way. The time may come when I will not be able to work and still have to live. Yes, I will live in two rooms and save all I can, but I will have to begin to look about this very afternoon. I will consult Mrs. Ferris about it before I begin. She is acquainted with the people. I could never live with those who would think it necessary to watch my actions as a precaution against possible evil to themselves. I must be very careful. To live in an air of mistrust would be unendurable.

"Oh, what a bitter lesson the last few days have been to me, when I always have felt that a change of manner after an inspection of character or of a life was evidence of irregularity, or even an admission of guilt. Now my whole mind seems intent upon trying to escape those scrutinies, if it does necessitate a change."

A few days before the time arrived for her guests to make the change to the house of Mrs. Ferris, Mrs. Grey went to that lady, told her plans and asked her advice. "You are better acquainted than I am with the ways of the world, tell me what will be best and I will do whatever you advise. Have you ever thought what helpless creatures we women are? We may think that we are capable of taking care of ourselves until the test comes, and then we find that we are sadly wanting in courage." And then she related the experience that she had passed through. "I feel that I would rather deny myself almost anything than to have such a thing happen again. I believe it would make me look and even feel guilty if I thought my every act was tested to find what was the motive that prompted it."

Mrs. Ferris, who had heard the story from her brother and his wife (but only on promise of the strictest secrecy),

had given Mrs. Grey's future some earnest thought, and had even formed some plans for her, should they meet with her approval, but wisely concealing her own thoughts she waited for Mrs. Grey to complete her story, and then she said kindly:

"I thank you for your confidence in my judgment. I consider that as a compliment from one like you. I am glad for my own sake, as well as yours, that you came to me, for I think that I will be able to help you. It is in a way that I know would be a pleasure to me, at least. I have some rooms that have never been of any service to me, but have only come in for a cleaning twice a year, and if you think my society would be agreeable to you I would be pleased to have you come and take possession of them."

"Oh, no, Mrs. Ferris; as desirable as such a change would be, I could never bring myself to take advantage of your kindly interest in me. I could not permit you to empty your well-furnished rooms. The rent that I could afford to pay would not justify you in making such a sacrifice. My present income would not admit the paying of the real price of your rooms, and I could not permit a reduction."

"If you refuse I will think that you object to me, and in that case I will not insist, for I have tried every means in my power to win your approval and friendship, and if you do not come I will know that I have failed to make a favorable impression regarding the desirability of my society."

"Mrs. Ferris, I know you mean well, and I thank you from the depth of my heart for your kindness; but you are thinking of my good alone. It could not fail to become tiresome to have a stranger under your roof, even

if I could afford to pay you well, a thing that you know is beyond my power."

"Mrs. Grey, I know that you can not afford to pay high rent, and for that very reason I want you to come to me, and I hope that you appreciate my good intentions enough to let me do this much for you. Those rooms are not in use. They are furnished, it is true; but we have a large garret, and can soon store the goods that are in them, and there is also room for such things as you would like to store. You might want to keep more than it would take to furnish your apartments. I hardly know how to proceed, but I hope that you will not be offended when I tell you what I have on my mind."

There was a certain reserve about this little woman which even the kind and wealthy Mrs. Ferris had failed to penetrate. So it was with the greatest reluctance that she approached this part of the subject.

"Be assured," she went on, "that it is only the appreciation of your genuine worth and the desire to be a friend that causes me to say this to you. I know how necessary it is for you to save some of your earnings. We have an abundance." She saw the color rise in the face of the other, and hurried desperately into her subject before she could have time to interrupt. "You have saved us quite a sum by giving our daughter such excellent instructions here at home; you have saved us the expense of sending her away to an academy of music, which would not be a small one, and we would gladly give you a home, if you would only accept it."

"Oh, no, Mrs. Ferris! I know that to you I look like a person in need, but I could never live upon the charity or benevolence of another. My pride would suffer a blow from which it would never recover. I know that I am poor, but I would never accept the value of a penny

without a fair return. I know that you mean it for my good, but please say no more about it; I really could not bear it."

Mrs. Ferris crossed the room, took a seat by Mary Grey's side, and threw her arms protectingly about her. "If you would only let me be a mother to you, how happy it would make me. You are sadly in need of a friend and protector. Come to me and I will endeavor, as far as lies within my power, to take your dead mother's place. I could not hope to take her place in your affections, but I could be much to you, and you would be so much company to us all; so say no more about being a stranger under our roof."

"Please do not try to tempt me, Mrs. Ferris. I know that you would be very kind and that I could not fail to be happy with you; but it is beyond my means, and so I would rather go where I can pay my way according to my conscience."

"I will be candid with you. I had made up my mind for some time to have you live with us, and can not well give up; and if you are so determined upon earning your way, I will give you an opportunity to do so here. We have a great many small duties that are not very hard, and still too much for me since Ellen is not strong enough to be much help. You can come to us and live as one of the family, and help me with such tasks as I may impose upon you. I will try to find enough for you to do to ease your conscience, since that seems to be a source of such trouble to you. You could sell your household goods, invest your money where it will draw interest and add to it such as you can earn, and live with us in quiet and contentment, and by the time that you are tired of us and anxious to get away you will have saved something to depend upon. Please let me help you

do this, and we will endeavor to make such a pleasant home for you that you need never regret the step."

"Mrs. Ferris, I am very grateful to you. Believe me, but I can not accept your kind offer—at least not at once. I must have time to think. Give me a few days in which to look about, and if at the end of that time I have found no rooms I will consider your offer. But, believe me, under no consideration will I accept your kindness unless I can make myself worthy in a practical way. Since self-sustenance seems to be my only hope in future, I can not be particular as to the means. But give me time. 'This is a matter of no small importance to me.'"

"Nor is it of any less importance to me, but not from your point of view. My greatest anxiety is that you let me be such a friend to you as no human soul can well do without—one who has your interest and happiness at heart."

But she did not tell her that her chief object was to get her where she thought she would be safe from the vigilant eyes and busy tongues of her enemies. Even Mrs. Ferris, with all her experience with the world, did not at that time realize the fruitlessness of such an attempt.

Try as she would, she could get no further promise from her; could not dissuade her from her purpose of looking elsewhere. Had she known what this quest held in store for her young friend, she would have plead with her from the depth of her heart. But ignorant of this, she was obliged to let Mary Grey go and find out for herself what this world of ours holds in store for those women who must fight life's battles alone; that the world did not mete out its judgments according to merits and deserts, but that superior worth and capabilities were more often sources of aggravation to envy and malice.

She had thought the experience of the last week bitter, but she was yet to learn the lesson that was to leave its impression upon her heart in letters of flame; the lesson that is learned by unsuspecting humanity every day: that no matter how false a report had been proven, that did not interfere with its circulation and eager acceptance by groveling minds.

CHAPTER XIII.

A SEARCH FOR ROOMS.

SO all unconscious of the treatment that she was about to receive she started on her fruitless search—fruitless in all but hopelessness and despair. She tried first at some of the more fashionable houses, where she had been told the people had found it expedient to let a few rooms to desirable parties. For she thought, it is those who are most worried over the cares and necessities of life that become narrow and envious.

But she soon found that the fact that the better class did not condescend to take part in any scandal, did not always prevent them from hearing of it. Yes, they had heard the talk about Mrs. Grey, and it had come through people of her own church too. And since those very people had not corrected the mistake they had made, they did not find it desirable to run any risks. So they told her politely, but coldly, that their apartments would be more suitable for gentlemen, or man and wife.

The truth dawned slowly and painfully upon the poor woman's mind as she met with the same firm refusal at all the most desirable places. But she continued her search, growing less and less exacting as she went from one to the other of the less spacious but comfortable looking houses. Here she was received in a way that could not well be misunderstood. Their steady strife with the world, to meet its demands, had led them to think that to insure safety and success to themselves necessitated the closest watch of all who might come under their eyes; and, as is usually the case, their vigilance had become such a predominant feature that con-

cealment was next to impossible. So they each met her in a way according to what they thought the occasion demanded, but with open disapproval on all sides. They did not think that she looked exactly like such a very great sinner, but the news had come through people of her own church; and where there was so much smoke there must be a little fire, and it was always best to be on the safe side.

One who found it hard to decide between caution and a desire to rent her rooms, began to make overtures by saying, "It is so hard for women to keep themselves above suspicion. They have to be very careful how they act. If you came to room with me, I should have to ask you not to have any gentlemen callers. Not that I care, but I would not like to get myself talked about, and if men were seen coming here, people might think they were coming to see me; and then I could not afford to have anything wrong go on in my house any way. And after a woman once gets herself talked about, everybody who associates with her get themselves watched as closely as she does."

"You need have no fear," said the now almost desperate woman; "I will have no gentlemen callers, for who would there be to call on me?"

And then she recollected herself. "But I may have some young men in my class. You know I support myself by giving music lessons, and in case young men should ask me to give them instructions, I could not refuse them."

"Oh, of course," said the woman, "there would be nothing wrong about that; but the music might not be agreeable to my husband. And I have heard of two young ladies that want my rooms. They are sisters, and such lovely girls, they say. So I guess I had better not

rent them at present. Rooms are quite in demand, they say."

What should she do next? What could she do? But she was more determined than ever to secure rooms. If she was mistrusted on all sides like this, how could she bring herself to take advantage of her friend's offer, who was, no doubt, aware of all this, and was led through her kindness and solicitude alone to make her this offer of shelter and protection. She would go among the women who worked for their living. She felt that she no longer could be a chooser, but must be satisfied with whatever might be obtainable, regardless of locality or kind.

"Ah, Mrs. Grey, it's rooms that ye are in search of," said Mrs. O'Grady, when the weary house hunter presented herself at the home of Mrs. Murphy, where the two friends were spending the afternoon in earnest conversation and excited altercations by turn. "Faith, and did yez think that it was an intilligence office that me frind here is kapin'? It is no such lofty occupation that we are engaged in. Now, if it was a laundress that ye was afther, I would recommind the good Mrs. Murphy hersilf, for all the belles and beaux, and aven the ginty itsilf, owe their smart appearance to her illigant skill."

"Mrs. O'Grady, it is the proize that ye would take for kissin' of the blarney stone! If Oi were ye, Oi would enter the contist for it. It would be aiser imploymint for yez than to be earnin' your wealth with suds and soap and foine starch. It might prove fatiguing to your aisy tongue, but it would be savin' of your hands and might be the manes of makin' a foine lady of yez yet," said Mrs. Murphy.

"Mrs. Murphy," said Mrs. Grey, "I came in to see if you had any rooms to let."

"And who would be afther occupyin' of the rooms if

Oi had? A man or a woman? Oi could not be afther lettin' rooms to a woman who would set up her tub and board and purloin me business out of me hands. Rooms for yoursilf, did yez say?" And she opened her eyes and held up her hands in true Irish fashion, with many such profuse exclamations and ejaculations as are peculiar to their tongue. "Oi have no rooms for the loikes of ye, at all, at all. Why don't yez go among the gintility, where yez belong? It is no one but the common laborin' class loike mesilf that Oi would take into me humble home. No one could be holdin' up thimsilves and their illigant manners above me under the shelter of me own roof-tree. Oi say let the gintlefolks kape to thimsilves, and not be burdenin' common folks with their grand ways. Go back among the handsome houses where your lady face and white hands belong and will not look so out of place."

"Mrs. Murphy, I have tried all day, and have been everywhere. If you could let me have two rooms, I would be, oh, so glad. I belong to the class that must earn their own living, and would be thankful for the accommodations you could give me."

"Ye may be laborin' for your bread and butter, but it is not to the laborin' class that yez belong. Ye would look loike a posy in a bed of thorns, and some big hulk of a fellow would be afther a-pluckin' you to wear on the lapil of his coat. It is a sad accompaniment that me playin' on the washboard would make to your illigant music. And thin Murphy and mesilf could niver fale at home and aisy loike to have sich a grand thing as a pianny in our house."

The two women went on expostulating, as only the true daughters of Erin know how, against her thinking of associating with "the loikes of thim," commenting extravagantly upon her beauty and "illigance," until, seeing how futile would be any further attempt, she took her

leave. She was scarcely out of hearing when Mrs. O'Grady changed her tone in a way that was suggestive of extensive cultivation on that particular scale in the voice of our friend.

"Faith, and it's no dacint woman that would have to be runnin' about loike that to foind a shilter for her head. And what are foine ways whin there is no character to back them up with? And from the tales that are floatin' about, it's not a very good name that she has, nohow; and it came through thim as should be able to judge. Small thanks to her, to come and try to be intrudin' herself upon thim as have nothin' but their good names to kape their heads above the water, after she has been refused at ivery other dacint place in the town. But it is not mesilf that is to be caught nappin', me foine lady."

Mary Grey had begun her search with a quiet determination. She felt that two rooms with desirable people in a quiet locality would be best for her, no matter how alluring the home of her friend might seem. But as she went on, her resolve grew into desperation. She must have a place that she could call her own. And her repeated failures only added fuel to the flames, as she went from one to the other of the places which she had slighted on her first round; and in her eagerness she almost lost sight of her friend's offer entirely, and would have engaged rooms among the poorest and most lowly had she only been able to do so.

We all know that when we are undergoing some great mental strain, even though the fates seem against us and all seems dark and hopeless, it is well that we fail in our attempts, or else, when the reaction came, we would be led to regret our ill-made choice; and many may well attribute their success in life to a Providence which leads them on, through failures in small things, into the vocation for which they were peculiarly fitted.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE SALE.

THE tide of Mary Grey's feelings had reached the lowest ebb; then, as if to verify the old saying that "the darkest hour comes just before the dawn," the cloud of despondency was suddenly lifted. Might it not, after all, be best that she failed? What would a home be among people who took no interest in her, only to mistrust and watch her every action?

"I suppose," she thought, "this hard lesson was necessary to teach me to appreciate the good things of this life. I should certainly be thankful that such a home has been offered to me. How very ungrateful Mrs. Ferris must think me, but there will still be time to manifest my appreciation. I certainly do not lack in that. I will go to her and if I try hard enough I ought to be able to make myself worthy of her kindness."

This earnest resolve to do her best proved a great comfort to her by clearing away the small clouds of doubt and fear from her mind. Her face was a study to her two guests when she reached home; she had not told them her mission when she left in the morning, but Mrs. Ferris had been there during her absence and had laid the whole matter before them in all its details.

She said: "Mrs. Grey is a woman who certainly has my deepest sympathy and highest regard. I know that she is thoroughly capable of taking care of herself, but she is still sorely in need of a true friend—a role that I would gladly assume if she would only give me the right, but she is so independent in spirit and with all so sensitive that one must approach her with the utmost care lest

they repulse her. I think, with winter coming on and her limited means of support, the best thing for her to do would be to come to us; but from the look of determination that she had on her face this morning, I know that she will leave no means untried to find a house. It may be best that she does not know the power of those ill-disposed people, but she might spare herself much pain and mortification by avoiding them if she knew their natures. She will not be likely to confide her troubles to you, but if she should give you an opportunity try to influence her to make her home with us. She would certainly be a welcome addition to our household, for she would be both friend and helper."

The effect of the kind lady's words was to thoroughly arouse the interest of her brother and his wife; not that the story contained anything strange, for in the city the brave-hearted women who were courageously trying to support themselves (and many, some more helpless ones who were depending upon them) and protect their honor were legion, and they also knew that the guardian angels of such must redouble their vigilance to keep them under their protecting wing.

But while Mrs. Alton resolved that something must be done to place Mrs. Grey beyond pecuniary need and the idle talk of the town, the man who had listened so attentively to the recital of her trials took a view of the matter peculiar to himself; not that he had associated her helplessness in any degree with his own future, but he had seen many pure, high-minded women, when driven to the wall, accept benefactions from those who wore a thinner guise and had a worse purpose than he. Could his thoughts have been analyzed there might have been found even a secret hope that her proud spirit might be driven to the sorest straits. But even then, could he

succeed in winning her confidence in such a way that she would accept assistance from him? He knew that those who are led through their own high sense of honor to place implicit confidence in all mankind are the ones who will flee from betrayed confidence as from the evil one; but after all, that was the only kind worth befriending—and why should he not befriend her? She certainly was in need of a protector, and the fact that one woman had a legal claim to him need not stand in the way.

“I am rich, and am constantly called upon in behalf of charitable purposes. Would it not be an act of benevolence to keep one poor woman from toiling for her bread, even if she is a young and beautiful one instead of those old and ugly ones in whose aid I am solicited almost every day?”

Thus reasoned the man who had come so bravely to the front in the defense of a woman against her petty feminine antagonists. His manly nature had been aroused to the height of indignation at their dastardly attempt to crush her pride and good name, but he himself would invade the fortress of her soul by deliberately depriving her of her self-esteem. He would dismiss conscience without a hearing, drag her down from her own high standard, simply to cater to his own vanity and conceit. And after all, if he succeeded in bringing her down on a common level with the rest of humanity, it would be through no fault of his, but because she could not withstand the adversary of her soul, and no question would arise to disturb the serenity of his mind.

Thus, no matter how cunningly contrived and gilded the web may be, if the unwary and innocent fly can be lured into its meshes, the lordly spider has the undisputed right to keep it a helpless prisoner in his toils, and then, when wearied by its struggling and futile attempts to extricate itself, crush it to the death.

Fred. Alton covertly watched the face of their hostess. She looked so cheerful and bright. This to most onlookers would have seemed an unmistakable sign of success, but he was not so certain. His-unbounded opinion of his insight of woman's nature had undergone a great change in the last week. There was, after all, more in a woman than that which lay on the surface (or at least with some), if that one is like an open book with large print. "I used to look upon that as the greatest charm that the sex is in possession of."

He studied her simply for the interest that it afforded him, and not that it made any material difference to him if she went to the house of his sister or to rooms of her own. In case she went to the former he would have an earlier opportunity to win his way into her good graces, while in the latter case she would the sooner lose that wonderful self-confidence and consequently be more like the rest of her sex.

She gave them no opportunity to influence her, and it was from Mrs. Ferris that they heard, a few days later, that she was still to be sheltered under the same roof with themselves. She remained at the cottage only long enough after their departure to make her final arrangements for this, to her, great change.

"I will not burden you or encumber your house with unnecessary articles of furniture," she said to her friend, "but will sell everything. Since I am forced to give up the old life, I might as well resign myself to an entire change."

So if her still bleeding heart was wrung almost beyond endurance when the day for the private sale arrived, she made no sign, and the set look on her face was attributed to stolid indifference, as one after the other of the articles that had been so closely associated with her husband as

to almost seem to speak to her of him were brought out for the inspection of the idle crowd.

Many had come without so much as a thought of buying; others with a vigilant and wide-awake eye to clutch at the opportunity to buy such things as might be under-sold. With such characters, as is usually the case, the sale abounded. They stood just outside of the bidding ring, with an assumed air of indifference. Oh, no; they did not care to bid on that article—they really could make no use of it if they had it! But at the same time their sense of gain was keenly on the alert, and when the bids, which had started so briskly at the outset, were beginning to lag, and the article was just about to go to the highest bidder, and the crier would hold his hammer for a moment suspended in the air preparatory to bringing it down, they would with a sudden thrust add a nickel, and sometimes even as much as a dime, and then unexpected to everybody but themselves were in proud possession of something which, according to their verdict, was worth twice the amount which they had given for it and just the thing they wanted.

The once proud and happy woman watched until the last piece of furniture had been removed from the premises and the crowd of buyers and non-buyers had left, but not without many side glances, gesticulations, and remarks. Then she turned to her friends with a sad, sweet smile, saying: "There goes the last thing that I had which would have reminded me of the old life. It was much harder than any of you know to part with them, but since I can not recall my husband to share them with me, I thought it best (no matter what the sacrifice might prove to be) to part with all that might keep the happy past, beside which the uncertain future would prove such a painful contrast before my eyes."

She then gave orders to the drayman to have her personal effects transferred to the home of her friend, or in other words her own future home (but for how long no one was able to foresee), and then, without so much as a glance at the empty cottage, walked with the rest toward the Ferris residence. They did not attempt to break in upon her thoughts, but allowed her to walk along undisturbed by their side.

But one pair of eyes had been upon her all day, and were still watching her. Not a look of pain had crossed her face unobserved by him. He marveled at the brave look on her sad face. "Most women would have shed oceans of tears," was his mental observation, "and would have spoiled their bright eyes for days to come," (and his eyes were drawn involuntarily toward the face of his wife) "and if for no other reason than that it was expected of them and their duty to their departed. It is more satisfactory than I know to see that they are not all so weak."

CHAPTER XV.

MRS. GREY RECEIVES AN ANSWER TO HER LETTER.

MARY GREY was unconscious of the close scrutiny that she was undergoing, but was busy with her own sad thoughts instead. Today reminded her of a similar experience through which she had passed some ten years before, when she had sold the household effects that had been used by her parents during their happy married life. Her cup of sorrow had indeed been full and had seemed more than she could bear; but what are the passionate griefs and loves of youth compared to the deeper sorrows and riper affections of maturer years? The sorrows of the last few months had burned themselves into her soul, and the memory of this day, with a few others, would remain pictured in her heart with all its keenness.

The first few days after our heroine had been established in her new quarters her friends left her much to herself. The excitement had been hard on her, even though she made every attempt to conceal its effects. She went aimlessly about, but on the third day her languor disappeared, and her usual health and spirits returned. She received an answer to the letter which she had written to Colonel Wilkins about two weeks before. Her letter had been mislaid, and had only reached the Colonel a few days before. He wrote that he would be pleased to secure a good music teacher for his boys, they, however, were partial to their own instrument, and he would prefer to have them receive their lessons at home.

“But that need not interfere with our securing your

services," he went on. "My horses are growing fat in the stables, too fat for use, just for lack of exercise. They with the carriage would be at your disposal. I have no doubt of your ability to please us, for I have heard of you. I will call on you at your convenience, and if we can come to an agreement my sons can fetch you and take you back; an arrangement that can not fail to meet your approval after you have once seen the country over which you will pass. We think there is none more beautiful."

The recipient of the letter did not know that the Ferrises and Colonel Wilkins were old friends and that it was Mr. Ferris who had recommended her as a teacher, and that the kindness shown in the letter of the country gentleman was due as much to his influence as to the noble spirit of the writer. Her letter had reached him just a few days after the two men had had their conversation.

After she herself had glanced her letter over, she gave it to Mrs. Ferris to read. "I am very glad," said that lady, "that you have met with such good fortune. They are excellent people. Our families have been friends for years—since long before Mrs. Wilkins' death. A little forethought might have secured the sons for you as pupils some time ago. Miss Ecclair, the Colonel's sister, is a noble woman. She has never been married, but instead of being soured and prudish and having the qualities usually attributed to single women, she is sweet and lovable and just such a lady as is good for any one to know. How fortunate that they do prefer their own instrument. A drive to the country once a week will do you more good than anything else that your best friends could suggest or the most skillful physician could prescribe. I am so glad for you. I am looking forward to a pleasant winter

for us all. You will then have five pupils, and will be able to lay something away for future use. If I were in your place, I would content myself with those and not try to get any more this winter."

"Oh, no, Mrs. Ferris; I will only have four. Do not think for a moment that I will accept pay for your daughter's lessons. You know that would only be making matters worse for me; even if I exert all my powers I can hardly repay you for your kindness, and you know that it is a greater trial for some to realize that they are not earning what they receive than it is for others to know that they do not get what they deserve. Now you would not want me to exercise my mind night and day to contrive a way to make myself worthy of what I am receiving at your hands." And she looked up at her friend with an arch smile.

"Well," said that lady, with an answering smile, "you do put things in an odd way. I do not pretend to understand your way of reasoning; but you had better not form your conclusions too rapidly, or before you get through you may think that you belong to the kind that do not get what they earn. You have only been here such a short time that you do not know how exacting and tyrannical I can be. But we will wait and see about the pay." And she gave a look of tender and motherly patronage to the face that was so innocent and girlish, yet so earnest and thoughtful, and then went on: "You may even join the ranks of the dissatisfied wage-workers before we are together long. It is said that people know little or nothing about each other unless they live together. We are doing that now, and according to the adage will have an opportunity to find each other out, to make wonderful discoveries in each other's natures."

"Well," said Mary Grey, laughing, "if that is the only

possible way for two to find each other out, people do indeed make a leap in the dark when they marry, and we should not be too severe in our judgment of those who fail to agree. Since there is a way provided for me to reach Colonel Wilkins'," she said, resuming her subject, "I am also glad that they prefer taking their lessons at home, for since my piano went with the rest of the household goods I can only take such pupils as have their own instruments. Sometimes I almost wish that I had kept mine, but I did not care to encumber your house with it, since you have one."

"Had I known that you especially cared for yours you should not have sold it. I would gladly have made room for it; but, as you say, there is one here, and it is at your service the same as if it were your own, and if any of your pupils care to come here to take their lessons you are at perfect liberty to have them do so," said Mrs. Ferris.

"I have none such now, but I thank you heartily for your kind offer," was Mary Grey's answer.

"Colonel Wilkins speaks in his letter of meeting you at your own convenience; that would necessitate another letter. He and his sister come for a drive almost every week. The lady makes her stopping place here while in town. Then he comes for her when he is ready to go home. They usually come on Thursday, so we can expect them today. You can talk to them, and, if you suit each other and can come to an understanding, there need be no further trouble," said the kind lady, thoughtfully.

"I think that I am as near happy as I will ever be again. I certainly have much to be thankful for," thought the appreciative little woman. "I will have work enough to save something; I will have a pleasant home, and they are all so kind to me. Mrs. Ferris is almost like a mother, while her daughter and Mrs. Alton are kindness itself. As

for the men, I don't see how they could possibly show me more courtesy. I never had a brother, but if I had he could not be more watchful of my comfort than Mr. Alton is. He certainly must be a kind-hearted man, judging from the way that he takes care of his wife. How fortunate she is to have such a husband, since she has no existence apart from him. Robert was just as kind to me, but I did not need the petting and attention that she does. I was always well; I never had a day's sickness in my whole life. I am so glad, because a busy man like my husband should never be burdened with a puny wife. I am so glad that I was always strong enough to share his duties instead of adding to his cares; but I am also glad that there are some men who have the time and means to take care of the helpless, clinging women, for the world seems full of them."

With her limited knowledge of the ways of men and her lack of opportunity to study their natures, she did not know that providence had been scant in its distribution of patience among their sex and that none of them had been endowed with any extraordinary degree of that virtue, and that sooner or later the chains which make them willing slaves for a time to puny and exacting wives (even though the links be golden) will corrode and become tiresome; and that even now the very man in question was beginning to hold up the woman whom he had helped to encourage into utter helplessness by his lavish attentions before his critical view, and that, no matter if he was partially to blame, her constant demand for his attention was growing just a little irksome. She did not know that the beautiful, willowy form of the wife was held in disparaging contrast to her own well-rounded figure, and that the husband was thinking daily, "How different would be my journey through this life, in which

I have so far been called upon to exercise the strength and mind for two, had I chosen for a traveling companion a sturdy little partner who would walk courageously by my side, and even lend to me a helping hand if the occasion required it; and the fact that she might not be so demonstrative and lavish with her affections would cause the interest to be all the more lasting."

Since it is human to err, and the best of us sometimes surprise ourselves with thoughts that are not in strict accordance with right and would only bring pain sometimes to our dearest friends were they known, it may be well that there is a secret chamber to our natures and that we have the power to conceal our unworthy reflections from human eyes. At least, were it not so, there would be such revelations daily and hourly as would flood this earth with unavailing tears, and many a loyal heart might well pray to be spared the painful disclosures.

Had Mary Grey ever been led to compare herself with Mrs. Alton, it would have been in a way disparaging to herself. How commonplace she felt beside that beautiful woman. So, all unconscious of the influence she was wielding, she went about her duties with a degree of cheerfulness.

When Colonel Wilkins and his sister came, true to the expectations of Mrs. Ferris, she was as pleased with them as they were with her. The business part of the meeting between the three people was soon disposed of. They were to come for her once a week and take her to their country home. She was to receive the highest price paid for such services, but she would be required to give them a whole day of her time as often as possible. They said that they were fond of music, and would demand that as a part of the return for the salary that she was to receive, and would take no denial. They would come for her in the morning and bring her back in the evening.

The keen-witted woman was not deceived by this ruse. She knew that the arrangement had been planed by Mrs. Ferris with her happiness in view, and her heart swelled with thankfulness. She felt that she had more real friends than she could ever claim at any one time in her life before, and she felt that they would be true friends, too, as long as she would prove herself worthy of their esteem.

The two people left, promising to come for her on the following Tuesday. This was Thursday. She was surprised to find herself looking forward with a childish delight to the drive in the country—the dear old country. She had seen very little of it since the death of her parents. Her life had been so busy since then that she had had little or no time for pleasure. All those things which are necessary to most people's enjoyment had been denied her, and she had had no recreation during the three years of her married life. But the earnest discharge of her duties had been a source of true happiness, and she had been more than satisfied.

Indeed to her the woman who must necessarily seek outside of her own home for enjoyment seemed an object of the deepest solicitude. She must surely have mistaken her own heart in choosing, if her happiness depended in the slightest degree upon others or their society. Nothing but necessity or duty ever tempted her from her home or the side of her husband, and now she wondered that even that sometimes had the power.

But the source of her happiness lay far away in the quiet church-yard on the slope of the hill, and she must be content for the rest of her life with minor joys. She must smile and seem glad, as is the case with thousands, a countless number who we meet daily and in every walk of life, and it is only a wonder that so many are able to carry out their part to the end. But the most skillful

acting has never been witnessed from behind gilded foot-lights, nor has it been produced in answer to the most persistent encore, but instead we are invariably the unconscious witnesses of such deep-wrought playing upon the stage of life as would try the ingenuity of a Garrick or a Quin, and could the lives of many be produced in a panoramic vision before them, they would be surprised at their own power.

The pain and humiliation in the mind and heart of Mary Grey had begun to lose their keenness. She was conscious of furtive glances that were cast upon her from all sides, but she felt that sheltered as she was, under the protecting care of her friends, their conduct toward her could do no harm. "Oh, why and how did I occasion their ill will? Surely if I pay no heed to their thoughtlessness, treat them as before when I meet them, and live my own quiet life without interfering with any of them, they will, if not relent, at least become so far indifferent as to make no more attacks upon my character and good name."

Was she correct in her conclusions? We will see.

CHAPTER XVI.

TOMMY'S TRIALS.

ONLY those who have been boys themselves, been in boys' scrapes, and had boys' consciences to contend with, and in the end had boys' punishment meted out to them, know the mingled remorse and boyish anger that had been filling the heart and brain of Tommy Green since we parted with him on the back alley fence, watching the grievance committee wending their solemn way on their important visit to Mrs. Grey. He had taken great satisfaction in seeing them depart. He knew that this was a matter of no ordinary importance, even to people who were as accustomed as they to making the small doings of their neighbors their own personal affairs. He could not foresee just what the outcome of the visit would be. If he could only turn himself into a mouse or a cricket, or he would not object to exchanging forms with a flea for a short time, if he could only hide in some convenient fold of their garments and witness the call which he knew would prove so disastrous to these women's good and exalted opinion of themselves, for one short while at least.

"Cracky! I would rather lay in a whole nest of fleas, and have a whole hive of mosquitoes with a band at their head to keep time for the Quickstep of the Fleas about my ears, than to be in them two women's and that girl's" (he made a grimace when he came to girl—"She's a lovely girl!") "shoes for the next half hour. But it will serve them right! If I had planned the whole scrape for Sis, I couldn't have done it to suit me any better. Well, this is just game!" And he threw his hat into the air

as he hopped down from the fence, after watching them until they had turned the corner and were out of sight.

It was too good to keep to himself any longer. He would just explode if he did not tell it to some one. But it was too important to tell before the whole crowd; he would only tell it to his dearest chum. So that favored personage was led off to the mow or other equally secret place, while the less highly privileged crowd was left to cast envious eyes after them, until one of them happened to think of something he knew. Oh, yes; it was just as good and a great deal better. So they went off together in search of a suitable place (since they had been barred out of their common rendezvous) to make and hear the disclosure, which was a weighty matter, indeed.

Meanwhile Tommy was regaling the ears of his hearer with what he had heard under the parlor window the night before his visit to Mrs. Grey's. "You know I had promised her, and I wanted to get even with Sis," he said in explanation. Then he told of the discovery he had made, and that his sister and others had watched Mrs. Grey's house, and they had all gone to an immense amount of trouble, all for nothing. And now he declared they were putting on the top sheaf by going over there.

"Oh, won't they feel like ninnies? This will take the dander out of Sis for one while. How I would like to throw it up to her! Gee! but wouldn't she be mad, and wouldn't I catch it, though? But I will try my best to hide it; she will never catch me. But," and a look of serious doubt came over his boyish face, "what if it should leak out some other way?" And he went on in a droll way, "It were better if a mill-stone be hanged about my neck and I be thrown into—yonder mud-hole. Well, Sis would make it hot for me, that's sure; but if she does she will wish she hadn't. If women do think

they're smart, there's lots of things we boys can do to pay them back that is against etiquette and would not look genteel of them and might spoil their chances to get a man."

But for a small boy who finds himself in an uncertain position with the feminine portion of the family, a conscience is a worse thing to have than a pebble in his shoe or a thorn hidden away in his coat sleeve or trousers leg. So when he was called in to dinner he watched his sister's face anxiously, but, as he supposed, unknown to her. But her vigilance was none the less keen. She was confident that he was the culprit; but how to prove it? She knew that she must contrive to get him to own his guilt, for she could never be induced to go to the only other three people who knew anything about the matter for proof. But how was she to go about it? She knew from past experience that an eel was nothing in comparison, for slipperiness, to a boy who was bending all his energy toward acquiring that rare accomplishment. She could think of no other motive for his conduct only a feeling of revenge and spite toward her. She did not know that it was an act of chivalry toward Mrs. Grey. He felt that he owed her some return for her kind and pleasant manner, and repaid her according to his boyish understanding. Had she understood him better, and made some assertion detrimental to Mrs. Grey's good name, character, or even her looks, he would have arisen in her defense and might have been led to disclose himself. But boys never did get credit for their good points—something that they certainly are in possession of, even though their faulty judgment sometimes makes the deed disastrous to their good intentions. So, through her limited insight into boy's nature, she ignored the only weapon that she had in her possession, under whose charge he would have

fallen an easy prey, and set about studying other tactics by which to entrap him. She resolved to try kindness. If she won his confidence he might be led to tell her something through which she might be able to make out a clear case against him.

But the boy, whose defensive powers had constantly been called upon in his daily combats with his sister, was well versed in intrigue and warfare. He accepted her kindness and unusual attention with a sly smile. He could see by her manner that she was in possession of a part of the truth; but he had had time to rally his courage and confidence in himself, and he felt himself equal to any of her "maneuvers," as he called them.

"Aha, Miss Sis, I am onto that! You may think yourself smart, but you will never catch me that way. I know that sweetness is all put on. That visit you made this morning would never have turned you into a sugar-pie. It would much quicker turn you into vinegar—or a crab apple, I should say, for all vinegar is made out of something sweet in the start, so of course you would never make any of that valuable article. But you do pretty well to help others to reach the biting point. Mother don't know what made that last barrel turn sour so quick. I heard some women as ought to know say that a good receipt to make vinegar over was to write the names of three sour-looking women on a piece of cat paper and drop it into it while it was undergoing fermentation. I knew that one sour old maid as was not satisfied with her condition was equal to two women, so I scratched off her name in big letters on a slip of brown sugar paper and dropped her in. I never told them, because it's best for boys to keep some things to themselves, if they do turn out well.

"I wont act as if I thought of a thing, but had forgot-

ten everything, and would be ever so easy to catch. As long as she baits her trap with good things, I will take all she gives me and act all the time as if it would just take a little more to make sure of me. But I am on to your scheme. You will never catch me that way," and he gave a comical pat to his stomach, which was even now exulting in an extra piece of custard pie. He could hold out a long while on custards.

When he got out of his sister's sight he threw his hat into the air, turned a double handspring and went off to tell his chum how he was living on the fat of the land, and that if he was sure things would always turn out to his taste like this, and that he could keep his sister in hot water, he would not mind being in a little danger himself.

But as days went on, the woman who was tingling for revenge was tiring of her plan with her wary little brother. Even if she could succeed in the end it was becoming expensive. The calls upon her purse-strings were becoming too frequent, and the nickles and dimes that had gone for marbles, and butterscotch, and what not, had been not a few, to say nothing of the taffy that she had been called upon to serve to the whole crowd, for the youngsters, knowing that it was only temporary, had been making hay while the sun shone. And now he wanted enough money to go to the circus himself, and some to help his chum, who did not have quite enough. It was wonderful what a close intimacy had sprung up between those two boys lately. This was to be the last show of the season, and the boy who did not get to go had better never been born into this world of disappointments.

Tommy was a little surprised when his sister promised him the necessary amount. With a keen intuition pecu-

liar to boys, he was beginning to see that his good times were fast coming to an end. It was still three days until the show. He would much rather have the money now, but since he had hinted so much repeatedly, and had been put off every time, he would have to be content with the promise, unstable as he began to think it.

She told him that she would not give it to him now for fear he would spend it for something else, and that it would be too bad for him to miss the show, since all the boys were going and this was to be the last one. She showed him the money, but said she would take care of it until the time came. This reassured him somewhat, and he looked forward, as only a boy knows how, to the coming day—the day of wonderful sights and heartfelt delights to the hearts of youth.

It was now the sister's turn to smile, if such a thing were possible in her frame of mind. She had overheard Tommy say that he was working Sis for all there was in it. It made her stamp her foot in anger to know that she had not only been worsted, but that the little sly antagonist had been laughing at her all the time. But she had laid her plans; she would have revenge, yes double revenge. She would assume the same role that he had been playing lately, that of innocence. She would act toward him as before, promise him the money, then when the time came she would see. He should not go if she had to tie him hands and feet. Her promise would keep him from trying to earn the money for himself. She had talked to the rest of the family until she knew that his appeal to them would be useless. And even if he should get the means from some other source, there were more ways than one to keep him at home. She knew that to miss this great event would break the boy's heart and spoil his enjoyment for days and weeks to come, but that

was exactly what she was waiting for. She wanted to strike a blow where it would reach a vital point; she wanted to get even with him and at the same time teach him a lesson that he would not soon forget.

The evening before the day, which according to the posters was to display all that this world contained that was worth seeing in one great parade, and afterward deposit them under one great tent for the closer inspection of the lucky town, had arrived, and Tommy had gone to bed, when the lateness of the hour compelled even boys who were to see a circus on the next day to do so, with a happy heart.

His sister had changed her plan of procedure, and had given him the money, and, after he had carried the good news to the sharer of all his good fortune of the last few days, he went to his room, and making sure for the hundredth time that the money would be sufficient, and that it was safe in his trouser's pocket, he went to bed, but not before he had tried to lock the door. But his sister had been before him in this little matter, and although the key was there the spring refused to perform its accustomed part; and since there was not an article of furniture in the room that could be moved against the door, he had to content himself by resolving not to sleep very soundly. He would not dare to do that any way, or he might not get awake as early as he would like to; for how would a town ever be gotten in readiness in time for a circus parade if the boys were not all up in time to see to things?

But Tommy, in spite of his resolutions and the wonders that were in store for him, was soon sound asleep, dreaming no doubt that his father had bought him one of those ponies that were running such wonderful races on the side of every convenient shed for miles about town, or

even a pair of them, or his dreams might even have transformed him into the proprietor of the whole wonderful exhibition.

But, alas, that our dreams should sometimes come to an end. When Tommy awoke, just as the first faint streaks of dawn were brightening the eastern horizon, the show was still a thing of the future, no matter if it was near. But there would only be a few more hours. Yes, they would soon be here. Why they must be here now. He could not mistake that sound of confusion; the sound of command and of hurrying to and fro, and the many things that were necessary in the preparation for so great an event.

The first sound that reached his ear had an electrifying effect upon every fiber of his being, and he was out of bed in what would be called quick time even for boys on show days. He made a grab at the bedpost, where he had hung his pantaloons, but there was nothing there. He felt around on the floor, where they might have fallen. They were not there. He struck a match. There on the table lay the silver half-dollar that his sister had given him—but where were his trousers? Then an idea dawned upon him that struck consternation to his heart! He flew to the closet where he kept the rest of his wardrobe. The shelves and hooks were bare; all his clothes had been taken away while he was asleep! He could not even as much as leave his room, much less go on the street or to the show. The door was open, but he was as much a prisoner as he could possibly have been under the combined strength of a dozen locks and keys. He knew that he was caught, and he knew by whom. His whole trouble had lain in the fear that she would not give him the promised money, but he had expected nothing of this kind.

There lay the money to add to his distress. His father and mother had been called from town the evening before, and his sister's power over the rest of the family was such that he knew his doom to be sealed. He must stay in his room all day and hear the distant sound of boys' voices, the band, and many other things peculiar to such days, and be shut off from every bit of it. Had ever such punishment been meted out to a refractory lad? Had all the forces of retribution been at work to repay him for his many boyish faults and mistakes, they could have contrived no better plan.

He knew that to coax his sister would be useless, and he understood her well enough to know that it would add to her enjoyment of the situation, and that he was determined not to do. So he went back to bed and pretended to be sound asleep when his tormentress came up with his breakfast. Everything was just as she had left them, but he could not deceive her, so she said: "I am surprised at your sleeping so long on show day." But she received no answer.

Then she gave him a vigorous push. "Get up, or you will be too late for the parade!" At which he gave a sleepy answer:

"I guess I run around too much yesterday; anyhow I am awful tired. I would rather sleep than to see six shows all in one. My head aches. I bumped it yesterday. I know the noise would make it worse, so I guess I will stay in bed."

In spite of his power to affect such submissive tones, his heart was almost bursting with boyish indignation.

No sooner had his sister taken her leave than his chum came in search of him. He had waited in vain about the streets, and when he had inquired for him down-stairs, his sister, thinking it would add to Tommy's punishment, told him he could find his friend up-stairs in bed.

Tommy knew that his chum would sympathize with him, but sympathy, like the half-dollar, would avail him nothing as long as he had no clothes to put on.

"Never mind, Tom," said that young hopeful; "I will get you a pair of my pants." And without giving the other a chance to reply, he was gone, and in what even seemed a short time to the waiting boy, was back. His wardrobe was limited, but he had found a pair of pants that he had outgrown (forgetting in his excitement that he was the smaller of the two) and a coat of his much larger brother, which articles he triumphantly held up before his waiting friend.

After laboring for some time, Tommy succeeded in forcing his chubby form into the small trousers, while every stitch was making a separate threat to give way, and it was at the utmost risk that he made a step. He then slipped into the coat. This was much too large, but he must put it on to hide his dirty shirt, for the clean ones had gone in company with the rest of the clothes. Even his shoes, ties, and hats were gone, and it began to look as if another trip would be necessary. But he would see first if he could find a hat and a pair of shoes in his father's room. Even if they were a little large, it would not matter. He found the necessary articles, but the shoes were twice the size of his feet, and the hat also told a plain story of borrowed plumage.

But what are small impediments to boys with a show in view? So the two slipped quietly down the stairs and out on the street.

Poor Tommy! The first sound that met his ears was, "Where did you get that hat?" He paid no heed to this; but when they walked up to a crowd of boys, he all the time trying to act as if everything was all right and his whole outfit had just been bought from the

tailor on special order, one of the little fellows, over whom the two had been lording it lately, remarked :

"Tom, if your head was as big as that hat, I would think you had the swelled head, sure."

"If it wasn't for the tight fit of his pants," said another, "I'd think he had shrunk. A hard puff of wind would blow all his other duds off."

But his exasperation did not get the best of him until they began to march in a circle around him, squinting first one eye at him and then the other. Then when they lifted the flap of his coat to make a closer inspection, the bump of antagonism developed into full size; and his right fist went out in a way that brought blood to one small nose at once, and caused a sound as of ripping in the seat of his pants.

But since his force was in the minority, the crowd soon had them rolling in the dust, and when they finally made their escape they looked much the worse for the warfare, and Tommy had to return and enter his home with even greater secrecy than he had left it; and by the time he reached his room every seam in his pants had parted company and there was nothing left for him to do but to go back to bed.

"Jim, you take the money and go anyway. Keep what is left until I get my clothes again. If I would keep it here, Sis might try to take it back—but she would have to fight pretty hard to get it; I would swallow it or throw it down a rat-hole first!"

So saying, he offered his precious half-dollar to his friend, half hoping that he would refuse to take it and offer to stay with him. But that was not in accordance with boyish nature, and he took the money, saying :

"I will have to hurry or I will be too late for the parade. But I won't spend any more of your money

than just enough to take me into the show." He said this in a reassuring tone, which he intended should be a great comfort to his friend.

But the poor boy was no sooner left alone when he burst into a passion of weeping. Every bit of brightness seemed to have gone out of his boyish life.

Hark! he heard music. The show had begun its parade of the streets. He listened a moment, then jumped up. It might possibly come past their house, and he would get to see that much after all. It was on their street, and seemed to be coming nearer and nearer. He was almost sure now that he would get to see it. There was only one more cross street, and if they did not turn there they would come past. He pressed his face against the window, but lo, he could only see the glint of one of the wagons now and then. They were turning the corner.

This was too great a punishment for even a boy who deserved it, and his grief knew no bounds; and he chafed and fretted all day as only a lad of his age knows how when his dearest hopes have been frustrated.

The boy who was enjoying the sights at his expense did not come near him again all day, nor did any one else until toward evening, when the author of this day's woes again made her appearance.

"I did not bring you any dinner, because if you had the headache bad enough to keep you in bed on circus day, you would not want to be disturbed. I thought you might possibly sleep it off, so you would be able to go this evening. I saw you go out this morning, and thought you were better; but when you came back so soon, I knew that it was no common case of headache."

She had seen Jim go slyly up the stairs with a bundle under his arm, and thought he might possibly outwit her yet; but when she saw him steal down stairs she only

laughed at the grotesque figure he made, thinking, "He will never reach the show-ground in that outfit."

He had hoped she did not see him, and when she looked at him so tauntingly he dropped the role of invalid, which he had assumed, and his pent-up anger found vent in the next half hour's exchange of words.

"I would rather have the headache and stay away from the show both, than to be a sour old maid like you, that is just mad at everybody because she can't find a man."

"And I would rather live single all my life than to be the mother of such a boy as you. I would never want it on my conscience that I raised such a boy."

"Well, I would pity your little boys! But it would not be respectable for you to have any, and that is a blessing; and you know that if you would do anything that is not virtuous and proper the sisters of the church might call on you. If I could get down town I would have the policeman after you for stealing my clothes."

"The next time I catch you carrying news I will do worse than steal your clothes. I will lock you up for a month, and not even give you enough bread and water, and thrash you within an inch of your life every day besides."

"Thrash me? I would like to see you do it! You're not able! It would take a half-dozen girls like you. I guess it's because you are too young. But you treated me so nice the last week, me and the boys were beginning to think we would listen to everything you said, and post bills or start a newspaper if it pleased you, so that you would give us money to buy good things whenever we wanted it, make us taffy, and even give us money to go to the show."

This last remark proved that the boy was forgetting himself in his excitement, and he would have given

much to be able to recall it when his sister said triumphantly :

"Why didn't you go to the show? Yes, I was good to you; but I guess I am even with you now. I got the worth of my money today; and if you ever carry any more stories to Mrs. Grey, or to any one else, I will have you sent to the reform farm. There's where you belong."

"I thought from the way that you three women started out that morning that you was expecting to reform the whole town and the whole world, so that there would be no use for such places any more; but you had better stay at home and reform your tempers and your tongues. It is a wonder your tongues don't get tired and hang out like a horse's when he has been doing too much and is tired. Mebby it's because you are only doing your duty," and he laughed heartily.

The disappointment of the day was fast wearing away during this display of boyish sarcasm and spirit. He knew that she felt the humiliation of that day keenly, and he determined on making the best of it, and went on mockingly:

"I hope the three between you were able to make Mrs. Grey see the error of her ways, as you were laying such plans to do, and that she may be influenced through your timely admonition to turn back to the paths of virtue and henceforth not even dare to set her cap for a good-looking man that the rest of you are after."

She made a grab for him, but he only curled himself closer into the farthest corner under his bed, where he had taken refuge when she first came up. The bed was too heavy to move and too low to crawl under, so he was safe just out of reach of her itching palms.

"It must have been just game for your grievance committee to be caught in the midst of your good work.

Mebby it made you feel the error of your way. If I only had seen it all I wouldn't care if I did miss the show to-day. It must have been just game." And he made such demonstration of his rejoicing as was possible in his cramped position.

"Say, Sis, if you tell me just exactly how you were caught I will forgive you for hiding my pants, and never play another trick on you in my life,—anyhow not until the next one,—and pay you back the half dollar, and all the rest of the money that you gave us boys, just as soon as I can get dressed and get out to earn it. I'll cross my heart that I will do it. Tell me, Sis, will you? I know it would be more interesting than *Paradise Lost* or *Robinson Crusoe*."

But his sister knew that when Tommy got into one of those sarcastic moods he was past being hurt by any of her thrusts, and not feeling sure that she even now had the best of him, she stole quietly out and left him talking. The last thing she heard him say was, "Say, Sis, mebbby if you would send a petition to congress, or something, they would make a law that would make it highly proper for you to have children. Then you could teach people how to bring them up in the way that they should go. It might be a little hard on the kids, but you would be doing a noble duty."

"If Sis thinks this will square things up," he said to himself, after he had found out that he was alone, "she will get an eye opener before she gets much older; that is, if she did get older, but she is younger now than she was the first time that I heard her tell her age. I wonder what she thinks us boys go to school for and study the multiplication table until we get dizzy headed, if it is not to learn how to add up old maids' ages and things. If she had not tore the leaf out of the Bible that had her

age or I could tell exactly, but she will find out that there are some worse things in the world than just for boys to know how old she is. She don't know me very well if she thinks that I would blab such a thing as that, that is, if it would spoil her matrimonial chances, because a boy would be foolish if he did anything that would work straight against himself.

"I wonder if she did not think that she was doing things up brown when she hid my pants so I could not go to the show? If I had only thought that she would cut such a caper I would have sneaked my clothes into the stable mow or kept them on in bed. Well, she did hit me hard, that is sure. She could not have treated me any worse, but I'll get even with her if I have to wait till I'm a man to do it. I won't wait that long though, because she might give me the slip.

"Oh, I'll even things up about right, if I have to get all the boys in town to help me. Before I get through with the process she will wish old maids had never been born, or else had a husband to take their spite out on. Oh no, Sissy dear, we'll not smoke the pipe of peace yet awhile."

With this conclusive ejaculation he peeped out to make sure of the absolute safety of such a venture, then hurried out from his retreat and back to bed.

CHAPTER XVII.

STILL TRYING TO DECIDE THE QUESTION.

ALTHOUGH the object of it was all unconscious of it, the excitement in the Cloverdale Church was still at fever heat. Should they leave her remain in the church? Should they allow their daughters to sing with one whose voice led in holy worship on Sunday and during the week was engaged in luring unsuspecting victims into the paths of wrong? For she had often been heard singing while that man was seen about the house. She had been heard by different persons, and respectable people, whose word could not be doubted.

It was evident that the three women, who had taken it upon themselves to lighten the duties of the official board and perchance keep those dignitaries out of temptation's power, had not given the sisterhood the benefit of their discovery. The fact of their visit leaked out, as such things have a way of doing, in a way shrouded in mystery. But when they were plied with questions by the daring or more privileged ones, they were very reticent about the matter. Aside from the fact that there was a man there, and that they had seen him, they could be prevailed upon to say nothing; but from their manner and a certain air they assumed, whenever the subject was introduced, it was plainly to be seen that everything was not as it should be at the Grey cottage.

So they were all left to form their own conclusions, and varied and numerous they were, according to the thickness of the film that had formed over the narrow windows of their souls. They each one resolved herself

into a committee of ways and means to find out all about the woman under surveillance.

They began by watching her, not so much for the general good as for the satisfaction of their own individual curiosity ; but they nevertheless compared notes and cast their theories and surmises into the general stock of evidence collected against her.

The man had been seen about the house at different times for about ten days, and then he was seen no more. No one had seen him close enough to know him should they see him again. Of course any one of them would have felt highly scandalized to have been seen near the house after that. If she would only stay away from church they would not worry themselves about her—but how to get her to do this, was the question. The unsatisfactory conduct of the three who had gone to her house to advise her had the effect of driving all such thoughts as that from their minds.

Then when the weekly paper came out, announcing that all the household goods of Mrs. Mary Grey would be sold by the town crier on a certain day, their endurance had reached its utmost limit. Why should they be kept in such suspense? What was she going to do now? each one inquired of the other ; but no one seemed to be enlightened on the subject.

Mrs. Ferris was seen going and coming from the cottage, but no one would ever think of asking her any questions ; not but what she was pleasant and kind, but there was an air about her which forbade any approach to familiarity. They knew that Mrs. Grey was giving the daughter lessons, but they marveled greatly at the friendly intercourse between the two women, and only attributed it to Mrs. Ferris' ignorance of the facts in the case. But the same feeling that kept them from ques-

tioning also checked any desire they might otherwise have entertained.

Could it be possible that the man had honorable intentions toward her and was going to marry her? She may, after all, only have been hunting rooms for a blind. If they were going to marry, they did not wonder that she preferred to follow him (which they had not the slightest doubt she would do) and marry among strangers, rather than to commit such an outrage to the dead pastor and society right in their midst.

Or worse still—horror of horrors!—could she be going to follow him to lead such a life as would even cast a reflection upon their judgment, if not upon their characters, for ever having trusted her? No wonder there was such an air of secrecy about her! No wonder she would not brave their righteous indignation!

Luckily the sale would soon be here. That might give them an opportunity to make some discoveries if they watched and listened closely; which they did, when the time came, and in such a way that some of them may even have lost a bargain by not attending strictly to their bidding.

The sale went on. She sold everything, even such things as they would think any true wife would have kept in remembrance of her dead husband. But what did she care! She did not want anything that would remind her of him. Her conscience would be clearer if she could forget him entirely—and she would do that, too, sooner than any of them could if any of their husband's died. But it was wrong to compare such women as her to themselves. She could not be expected to feel like they did.

In spite of sacrificed bargains and the utmost watchfulness on their part, the sale came to an end without the vigilants being any the wiser.

It had not been generally known that Mrs. Ferris' brother and his wife had come from the city, but one or two of the company had seen them drive away from Mrs. Grey's gate in the Ferris carriage, and knew they must have been here two weeks, at least. Mrs. Ferris had been cleaning house; that was the reason they had not seen more of them. They had been at the sale from the very beginning, and either Mr. Alton, his wife, or sister had kept at Mrs. Grey's side during the whole time. And when the last article had been sold, the gentleman stepped to the edge of the porch and said, in a tone that a few in the company had heard on a previous occasion: "It would greatly oblige Mrs. Grey if you would remove your purchases at once, as the lady wishes to secure the house and gates before she leaves, and it is growing late."

The tone of dismissal could not well be misunderstood, and the transfer was in active service for a time. Some of them left carrying the small articles of furniture that they had bought with them, and in a remarkably short time the cottage and yard was cleared; but not without many hurried whispers and mysterious shakes of the head that meant—well, what might they not have meant? They certainly were suggestive of much.

"Well," said one, "Mrs. Grey may not be as black as she is painted, but it always looks suspicious to me when the men are all ready to stand up for a woman. They are not such angels that they will do such things without some return. It is always a bad sign for a woman to stand in too great favor with them."

"It seems to serve Mrs. Grey a good purpose," said Mrs. Dixon, with a meaning look at Miss Green. Those two, with Mrs. Jones, could not have been prevailed upon to stay away from the sale; so they had come, trying to avoid being seen by keeping at a respectable but what

proved to them an uncomfortable distance from Mrs. Grey and her friends. We all know that their position could not have been an enviable one. Who has not, some time during their life, had a similar experience, and tried to avoid being seen if for no other reason than to—avoid being seen; and know how futile is the attempt to keep in a comfortable frame of mind, no matter what persuasive powers we try upon ourselves?

“And she takes it, too, as if it was no more than her due that the men should all assume an air of protection toward her.”

“Air of protection!” said Miss Green, with a contemptuous sniff. “Air of protection! I call that an air of proprietorship! I would think that even he would have had the common decency to hide that air before a crowd of respectable people. I would have preferred doing my own talking and giving of orders; but a widow is never satisfied unless she is receiving the marked attention of some fool man.”

“Yes,” said Mrs. Dixon; “it is a pity that some women receive their lordly attention, when there are others that would be thankful for ever so little.”

“Well, I am very glad that I am able to take care of myself,” said Miss Green, hotly. “I would rather be able to do that than to have the best man living, and, as far as I am able to judge, none of you have been able to secure him.”

Mrs. Dixon had told her husband some much plainer facts many times herself, and she knew that Miss Green was thinking of an altercation that she had overheard between them when they did not know that she or any one else was near; but she only said, with one of her tantalizing looks:

“I am glad for you that you are able to row your own

boat, and it is one thing that you have to be thankful for. If it does run woefully to one side sometimes, it is something to be grateful for that you can keep it sailing without any help, since no one feels equal to handling the other oar. 'The best man living'?" she went on. "That may mean much or little, according to the way he is handled. For even the best is not a saint, or we could not hope to keep him, for he would not be doomed to remain long on earth. I know that 'the best husband in the world' does not mean a 'perfect' being that it is in our power to secure and hold, but it means a constant effort on the part of the wife. It means a cheerful face, a tidy house, ready meals, and a wonderful skill at hiding any effort that it may cost, on her part, to keep everything in accordance with his tastes. But since we can only win and hold a man's affections and appreciation by ministering to the needs of the inner man according to the dictates of his palate, the outer according to the nicety of his tastes, and gratifying his vanity by affecting a cheerful air of homage, we might as well submit ourselves to the inevitable and make the best of life. And it is to our loss, if not discredit, if more of us do not have the 'best man in the world.' And after all, we could in no better way do credit to our alleged cunning than by securing for ourselves the best and most desirable of all this world holds in store for those only who are wise enough to lay hold of their rightful inheritance. So you see, Miss Green, according to the best reasoning that I am capable of, it will be in your power to make the coming man comfortable and self-satisfied, and he in turn will repay you by being the best husband in the world, and I can't see why you should not be happy when he once makes his appearance."

"That is a wonderful speech that you have just deliv-

ered yourself of. If I understood short-hand I would have taken it down, and we all hope that it may accomplish that for which it was sent. It certainly could not fail to do so."

"A word to the wise is sufficient," said Mrs. Dixon sweetly.

"Especially when it comes from the wise," said Miss Green, sarcastically.

"Well, I think we had better all show our wisdom by leaving, since we have been invited by the authoritative power to do so.

"Well I for one am not going to leave, or not go out of sight at least, until I see where she goes," said Miss Green, crossing the street and entering the house of her friend, where she took up her watch behind the lace curtain at the front window where she could see, herself, unseen.

While the above conversation was taking place, Mrs. Jones was in another part of the yard, regaling a privileged few with the knowledge that her superior insight into human nature gave her, regarding not only Mrs. Grey's conduct from the time that she and her husband had come so full of hope among them, down to the present moment, but also her unalterable future and doom, should she not learn wisdom and confide in some one older and more experienced than herself and ask for guidance. For aught she knew she might even now regain the respect and confidence of the sisterhood, at least if she would only select some suitable person—a suitable person, mind—and explain to her her conduct, and get her to make a satisfactory explanation to the rest of the justly dissatisfied members of the church, she knew that she, with her willingness to make the best of everything and tact to hide what should not be

known, could prove of invaluable service to her. She could have been a great help from the very start, when she first came a stranger among them. But instead of making a wise choice from among the older ladies of the church, she had acted from the beginning as if she not only expected to take the town, but intended to do it alone. But she never did see a young person that was too conceited to respect the friendship and advice of well-meaning older people come to a good end. Why, the very fact that she ignored their well-meant overtures was plain enough proof to her that there was something about her that she knew would not do to disclose to people of their high moral standard. Where such secrecy was necessary all could not be right.

“Do not ask me about that call that those two ladies and myself were led through the goodness of our hearts and the interests of the church to make. Had I known before what I do now, all my interest in poor erring humanity could not have induced me to neglect my home duties and sacrifice my own peace of mind as I did. Here, again, had she confided in me beforehand, I could have made an explanation that might have satisfied the minds of some, and she might have escaped having the church to appoint some one to watch her conduct. It is every person's duty to avoid making trouble for others, even if they don't mind risking their own standing in the opinion of those who can hold themselves blameless before the world. I don't suppose that a soul, unless it is those Ferris people (and they are too mole-eyed to be any judges in such or any other matters), know a thing about what she intends to do. Now, had she acted as she should, and told me—some one—I might have been able to get people to take a quite different view of it by saying: ‘What if she did intend to marry again? If her

friends and those whose advice she had asked could see nothing against it, I didn't see why others that had not been called upon need bother themselves about the matter, even if the parson had not been dead six months; and that if he was as good as he pretended to be, he would rather see her married to some man as would support her, than to see her struggle for her own living; and that I did not blame her for wanting to move away from a place where everybody was trying to pry into her business.' But as it is she will leave this town under a shadow—a shadow, I am afraid, that will follow her wherever she goes."

Mrs. Jones had talked in such confident tones about Mrs. Grey's marriage and removal from the town that her hearers marveled at her power to foretell, since she herself acknowledged that Mrs. Grey had made the great mistake of not confiding in her. But since this was by no means the first evidence of her foresight, they accepted the points in the case as conclusive, only wondering where the man came from, and, if he married her at all, where he would take her to, and how she had contrived to catch him so soon, even if a widow's cap was a trap from which escape was next to impossible.

Mrs. Jones had no doubt that Mrs. Grey would leave town. What else would she do? She was leaving her cottage, and she had taken care to find out that she had not succeeded in finding rooms. Neither had she any doubts that she would, at some future time, marry again. Hence her air of assurance. If she only married in a year or two, her guarded remarks might even be made to extend over that length of time, and her superior wisdom might still go unquestioned as before.

Miss Green waited until she saw the transfer deposit Mrs. Grey's belongings at the home of Mrs. Ferris, and

saw the four people follow in the wagon's wake and enter the house together.

"I might have known that she would go there, if she received the least encouragement. If a man once shows the least attention to a widow, she is worse to get rid of than a life-long habit. I might have known that she would contrive to be invited to a place where there is a handsome young man. What matters it to her whether he is married or single, as long as he is willing to play the gallant to her? If Mrs. Ferris had any eyes in her head she could see that there is something wrong between the two—or if there isn't now, there is sure to be soon. I wish I could arouse the suspicions of that young wife. That would be the best way to get the spiteful thing into hot water and pay her back for all her airs. And I will do it, too,—that is, if she stays there any length of time, for her stay, after all, may only be temporary. I wish I knew. I did not learn much by watching, because I might have known that she would go there tonight. It is hard to find out anything about such sly characters; but if we don't catch her in something, or pretend we caught her, which will amount to the same, she will stay here and have the best time of us all. There are enough young minxes here to turn up their noses at a sensible woman who prefers to live a single life, without a widow to encourage and help them along. But I think I will be able to make her feel that some other town would be a more suitable locality for her wiles."

In this highly exalted frame of mind Miss Green reached her home, more determined than ever to have revenge.

Such a problem had not been presented to the minds of the Cloverdale people for some time. Would even the united efforts of the sisterhood be able to bring it to a

satisfactory solution? They were at work upon it, individually and collectively. If it were not that Mrs. Grey was just the woman she is, they could not be induced to trouble themselves about her; they would let her go to the bad if she wanted to. But if she wanted to stay in their town and hold the position of their dead pastor's widow, her conduct must not only be above suspicion, but open, so that her actions could be understood; they would never tolerate an enigma in their midst. Upon this point they were firmly decided. It was not in accordance with the high moral standard of the town.

The discoveries of the next few days were varied, but mostly unsatisfactory. They were made known at the next meeting of the sewing circle. It was now generally known that Mrs. Grey was making her home with Mrs. Ferris; but how, would they still regard her as a friend, or would she be there in the capacity of an upper servant? They sincerely hoped the latter was the case. It would be such a good lesson to her pride to be obliged to content herself with making eyes at the milkman and vegetable peddler and curtain hanger. Would she be able to go on with her music? Would her hands not become too stiff? and besides, would people care to have their daughters take any kind of lessons from a woman who did kitchen work the rest of the day? They would not call on her, that was sure; they might be directed to the side entrance if they did. Well, they were glad she was going to stay in town, if that was what she was going to do. They would have an opportunity to get even. They would show her plainly that a servant was not good enough to be noticed by them, if she was a minister's widow.

"You talk," said Mrs. Dixon, "as if you had Mrs. Grey in the basement, and had the key in your own hand, with the power to turn the lock upon her; but if my eyes

(which are usually good) serve me right, that great pleasure will be denied you, for, depend upon it, she will reign supreme, not only in the parlor but in the hearts of her admirers. I saw them together several times, and they acted as if she was the sun around which the rest of humanity revolves. And she not only goes out in the Ferris carriage, but I even saw her in Colonel Wilkins' turnout. So you see the milk and vegetable men will have to look elsewhere for smiles."

"Yes," said Mrs. Jones, who had been reserving her knowledge for one great effort; "Mr. Alton told my husband (you know he comes here every fall, and the two men are quite well acquainted) that Mrs. Grey was to have a home with his sister as long as she cared to, and that the time could not be too long to suit any of them, and that she was to be regarded by all of them as a sister or very dear friend. He said that she was to keep her pupils, so as to be able to lay up something for herself, since she seemed to think that so necessary."

As far as her riding in the Wilkins carriage was concerned, there was nothing strange about that. She was going to give lessons to his two sons. That was nothing new to her. Why, she was at Mrs. Grey's when she wrote the letter of application, and that was several weeks ago. Why, she went to the office with her when she posted it; but she always was able to keep things until the proper time came for them to be told.

"But I still have grave fears for Sister Grey. I am afraid all is not as it should be. I still have serious doubts whether her influence in our church will be elevating to our young people. If she would only open up her heart to one of us older, more experienced women, we might even now be able to help her."

"But what has become of the man that was seen about

her house? I thought he might possibly be going to take her away," said a listener.

"I will tell you," said Miss Green, "why the man that was seen by so many reliable people at her house, and at all hours, does not take her unto himself. It is because he is not free to do so, since he is a married man, and is none other than Mr. Alton himself! I have concealed the truth as long as I intend to, and will do so no longer."

At this the voices of the whole company arose: "Do tell! What is this world coming to? If this world is growing wiser or not, it is certainly growing more sinful and weaker! His wife ought to be told! Mrs. Ferris ought to know it!"

"It would do no good to go to any of them with it. They would not thank you for your pains," said Miss Green, sneeringly.

This was rather a bold stroke on the part of Miss Green, but she knew that Mrs. Jones and Mrs. Dixon would not correct the mistake that the women were led to make, as they would necessarily be obliged to tell more than they cared to have known. So she only gave them a look which said plainer than words, "Tell the rest if you care to—it will make you objects of ridicule as well as myself."

As Miss Green supposed, there was no danger. They would rather give to their tender consciences what might prove their death-blow than to lay themselves open to ridicule. And after all, Miss Green had told nothing but the truth, even though she had not told it all: that was no fault of theirs.

"Well," said another, who was beginning to feel that she was falling behind in general knowledge, "I have seen some things myself, although I have never said anything. I never did believe in talking too quick."

"I have never told more myself than what I felt to be my Christian duty. I never interfere with any one only as duty calls me. But the supreme question is, shall we allow this woman to go on in our midst? The question for us to decide is, would it prove a detriment to the church or would it not? The only proper way for us to do is to consult together as sensible women, and then act as seems best; and if we should feel called upon to pass severe sentence upon the erring sister, we should do it in a Christian spirit."

The sister who had had her duty so plainly mapped out to her, and who had felt the reproof, could no longer refrain from adding her evidence, especially when a dozen pair of eyes were turned upon her in a questioning way.

She began to feel that all she knew would hardly have the power to send any one to the state's prison, but determined to make the best of it. So she began: "Well, they meet a little too often for me to think that it is accidental. Why, just the other day I was going toward the post-office. Before I got near I saw her go in. She was no sooner in than he came from another direction and followed her. And that same afternoon, as I was coming along on their street on the other side, I saw them meet again at the gate. Some might call such things chance, but I am certain that they are just the kind of chances that she is looking for."

This had the effect of calling out several others. One thought she had seen them turn the corner of their street together. She had gone to the window, but was too late to get a good view of them, but she did not believe that it was his wife that was with him. Another was certain that she never took her eyes off him while she was singing the Sunday before.

"The only pity," said Mrs. Dixon, "is that since the

widow is not to be gotten rid of, and there is no law to keep her from using her eyes as she pleases, that those who have been less favored by 'Dame Nature' haven't a right to spoil their beauty by throwing cayenne pepper or vitriol into them. I think the old 'Dame' need not have been so partial in her distribution of charms," (with a side glance at Miss Green).

"I think a dose of some kind on your tongue might not prove amiss," said that young lady, with as little show of temper as possible. "I am not good looking, but I am aware of it, and I have seen some that were no beauties and did not even have sense enough to know it. But perhaps it was yourself that you meant would like to throw the vitriol."

"If I did, it would be for your sake, my dear. I may suffer some by the contrast, but aside from that I have nothing to gain or lose by her beauty, since my facial defects did not prove objectionable to the good Mr. Dixon."

"Since there is no law in this country against staying single, you need not allow your interest in me to lead you into running any risks."

"Well, that would be a show of wisdom on the law makers' part, to attempt to deal with a case that a woman like you has been trying to manage for—well, a few short years at least. That would be trying a woman a little too hard to punish her for what she is trying her utmost to overcome. With all their powers of oppression men will never bring the law to that."

CHAPTER XVIII.

MRS. GREY'S FIRST VISIT TO THE COUNTRY.

ON Tuesday morning at an early hour, the Wilkins' carriage was at the gate, waiting to take Mrs. Grey out to make her acquaintance with the country adjoining Cloverdale, and to give her first lesson in that home which was to be such an important feature in her after life. The two boys had been sent for her. They were handsome lads,—John aged fifteen, William, seventeen,—lads in whom the consciousness of approaching manhood was carried with a quiet dignity, rather than in a self-asserting way. They had been sent for their teacher to give them an opportunity to overcome any shyness that they might feel in her presence.

They stood before her with an air in which modesty and deference were blended, an air that was the reflection of a regard, such as only a noble spirit can hold. They had been living in an atmosphere in which an unworthy sentiment, unless a very stubborn weed, would hardly have room to exist. This was due not only to a father's life and training, but to a mother's influence—an influence which was as a living presence about them, although their recollections of that gentle parent were faint. She had been dead for twelve years. They had only a dreamy remembrance of a sweet, patient face bending over them, and of a bosom upon which their baby sorrows were soothed. But that would have been all; and even that might have faded from their youthful minds had not their father ever kept her image before them in such a way as could not fail to leave its impression there.

Nothing had so far hindered him from taking them

once a week to the place which was so sacred to him, a quiet place in the village church-yard where lay all that was once his honored wife and the mother of his boys. Here he would bring them to talk to them of her. This, together with his own manner, implanted in their hearts a deep-rooted respect for her memory that would be a guiding star through life, and would ever be reflected in their bearing toward others.

"My sons," he would say while standing with them beside that silent grave, "whenever you are about to forget yourself in the presence of a lady, remember your mother, and even though you may meet some who are not worthy of the regard that she was, never treat any in a way that would grieve her heart."

This training, which was after all only the outcome of the ruling sentiment in his own life, that of a deep regard for all womankind, soon manifested itself in the boys' treatment of their little girl playmates. They knew that if they had a little sister they would have to act about right toward her, as they expressed it, and, unlike many of their associates, acted accordingly.

Mrs. Grey could not fail to appreciate their manner toward her, not but what this was her native element, but if you want not only the act, but alike the motive appreciated, show a kindness toward a worthy object.

After the two boys stood by hats in hand until their future teacher had time to enter the carriage and take the back seat, they seated themselves before, and soon the horses, which were a little restive in spite of their accumulated flesh, were speeding along. The road over which they passed was almost level, but to the right there was a downward slope which led to the river. This was so far from the highway that only here and there the water could be seen glittering through the trees and

shrubbery, which had just changed their robes of sober green for the gayer tints of autumn. The equinoxial winds were trying vainly to rob them of their variegated splendor, but they, like so many well trained matrons, bowed and courtesied at the storm king's lavish attention, but clung tenaciously to their beautiful colored apparel, which could not have failed to please the heart of madam tree.

Nature had indeed been unstinted in its distribution of hues and shades, and the oak, maple and butternuts were resplendent in all their glory, while here and there a giant sycamore lifted up its ghost-like trunk, which seemed a fit parent to the leaves which even the smiles of Indian summer could not coax into a rosier hue.

Across the river the slope was not so gradual after it had extended a half mile from the lowest point, but rose in such an abrupt manner that the eye could reach across the tops of waving trees and see green fields beyond, and still farther on another stretch of many-colored timber land. On a slight prominence the eye could extend over a wide area of country, over which were spread the fields upon which could be seen not only the fruits of this year's labor, cut and neatly shocked, but a fair outlook for next year's crop. And these were interspersed by groups of gay sentinels of the forest.

Mary Grey not only drank in great draughts of pure morning air but every foot of the beautiful scenery. Nestled among the trees was a mill. This was almost concealed from the eyes of the passer-by, but it had been built so far from the water's edge that in order to supply the wheel with the necessary water to turn it, an artificial lake had been formed by forcing the water from the river into a basin. This was plainly visible. Upon its surface a drove of swan-necked geese were sailing along in all

their majestic pride, while a flock of more active Pekin ducks were manifesting not only their industrious habits but alike their love for their natural element by diving here and there beneath its surface (upon which the sun was shining so brightly as to almost dazzle the eyes of the beholder), and then raise their graceful necks in such a way as to cause the water to flow down over their glossy backs, raise themselves only to immediately go under again.

The boys slackened the speed of the horses so as to give Mrs. Grey ample time to enjoy the scene. A little distance from here the river, in its serpentine course, flowed quite near the road, as if to coquette with the passers-by, and then off and away to the north even farther than before.

After passing all the scenery that could possibly be crowded into three miles of country road anywhere, they arrived at their destination. This was much too soon to suit one of the occupants of the carriage, at least. The rarity of such a pleasure, added to her natural love of the country (or a place where nature has room and opportunity to exhibit the products of her wonderful genius), gave her a pleasure whose keenness is seldom afforded to a more worldly mind. But the drive was over, and she almost sighed as the carriage stopped at a large iron gate. Her attention, however, was soon fixed upon the grounds that they were entering. The gate opened into a gravelled drive, which wound its crooked course around one side of the house, and then down the slope to the stables beyond. The house was a large gray stone structure, with white stone steps leading to a small verandah. The windows were high and small, which plainly showed that the house had never been modernized; which only served to lend to the house an added charm in the eyes of this anything but modern little lady.

The younger of the two boys assisted her in alighting from the carriage, and then conducted her along a short footpath and up the stone steps to the door, which opened into a spacious hall. There they were met by "Aunt Minnie," as the boys were wont to call her, one who could not long be spared by either of the boys. Thus relieved of his charge, the sunny-faced boy went to help his older and graver brother to put away the horses, which had lost much of their superfluous life and spirits and were glad to get back to the stable.

"I like her," said impulsive John, "and know that I will learn more from her than I did from that cross old Herr Professor, who always had his pencil ready to rap us across the knuckles."

"She seems very nice and I have no doubt that I shall like her very well, but my learning will depend more upon her playing and skill as a teacher," said the older brother.

They found her trying the piano when they entered the parlor, but she soon announced herself as ready for the lessons. Before the two hours were over, although not quite so enthusiastic, Will was as certain as Johnny that their father had been fortunate in securing Mrs. Grey.

After dinner, a meal which consisted of such things as a country gentleman knows how to produce on a well-tilled farm, Mr. Wilkins said, with an affectionate look at his baby son:

"Johnny, if Mrs. Grey does not object to a little walk, you might take her down into the ravine; and then, if she cares to go further, you can take her on down to the river. Most people seem to think the ravine worth seeing, and if you are sure-footed and do not object to a little careful climbing, you do not need to walk so far to reach the bottom," he said, turning to Mrs. Grey.

"I shall be delighted to go," was her grateful answer, "and am neither afraid of walking or climbing." And soon she with her sturdy champion were on their way; but not before she heard Mr. Wilkins caution the little guide to be very careful of his charge, and not to keep her out until she became too tired, but to turn back when she began to show signs of fatigue. She was not long in discovering that this advice had hardly been necessary, for although he possessed the untiring feet of a boy of that age, he was far from judging her power of endurance by his own, but instead was considerate far beyond his years.

The ravine, as they called it, was on the west side of the house; but the word was somewhat of a misnomer, for it was one of nature's excavations in the level earth, and began with a perpendicular wall about fifty feet deep and was at this end one hundred feet across. The end and the sides for two hundred feet were overhung with shelving rocks, over which the water trickled here and there in musical little streams. Wherever the water did not reach, and vegetation could possibly gain a foothold, ferns and lichen clung to the rocks in luxuriant profusion. The bottom near the walls was covered with loose, moss-grown rocks, but in the center the earth was covered with turf and a variety of mosses, with here and there a shrub, and a few stunted trees, whose tops reached just above the level of the earth above and seemed to be waving their arms for help, to interest some one in their behalf to help raise them from their low estate, so that they might be enabled to hold up their heads among their sister trees. But some of them had grown old in their vain attempt to extricate themselves from the depths in which they had lived, and, from the decayed condition of their trunks, it was plainly to be seen that old Father

Time was swiftly preparing them for not a higher station, but for that change which writes "finis" over many a higher aim and nobler ambition than was ever entertained in tree life. The depth of the ravine grew less as the earth above sloped gently to the river, which flowed about a quarter of a mile to the north of the house, and before it reached that point the whole slope came down to the level of the bottom of the ravine.

The two pleasure seekers went down the hill to where the weeds and underbrush began to grow along the sides of the steep descent. Here Mary Grey expressed herself as ready to climb down. Her companion would have taken her to an easier if not a safer place, but was none the less pleased when she said: "Oh, no; I like to do things in which I must exert myself to the utmost, and you know that climbing must be a little dangerous to be interesting."

The little fellow walked ahead, only now and then turning to help his companion over some particularly steep place or loose rock. Even this would have been unnecessary had he known how sturdy and adapted to climbing she was. His hand was offered in such a confident way that she accepted it more as an appreciation of his manliness. She could see that his dignity was not assumed, but innate; and as such it was the manifestation of the spirit that was inspired in his heart by his father's words: "My sons, when you are about to forget yourselves in your conduct toward a lady, remember your mother." This would not only have the effect to make him curb his boisterous nature when in their presence while a boy, but would make him kind and attentive to the sex to which his mother belonged during his whole after life. That this was not one of the fits of attentiveness to which all boys are subject—those spasmodic

attacks which are so soon superseded by one of total abstraction and indifference—was evident to his companion, and she thought: “He must not only be endowed with a noble nature, but must have been reared in an air of thoughtfulness and affection.”

When they had reached *terra firma*, they went back to the southern terminus of the wrinkle which nature in one of its savage moods had indented upon the visage of old Mother Earth, and stood for some time watching the water trickle down the sides, over the loosely hanging rocks. Those minute streams all collected into a pool against the southern wall, and this with the earth, that was blue in some sections and chalky white in others, and crumbled out from under the shelves of rocks, formed a bed of ooze the consistency of mortar.

The rocks here were very slippery and necessitated the greatest caution in approaching the slough; but they were repaid by any risk that they might have run, for just as they were drawing near a mass of loose earth and small stones came crumbling down the blue side and fell into the yielding mass. The boy took a stick and began to turn over the stones, when an exclamation of delight fell from his lips. He stooped and picked out a round form about the size of a shelled walnut, and wiped off the slime and dirt with such grass and leaves as he could reach from where he stood.

“I have been hunting for trilobites all summer,” he said, “but this is the first time that I have been lucky enough to find one.”

Thus encouraged, he began to look further, but there were no more to be found; so he had to be content with one of those little creatures, which only the ravages of time succeed in bringing from their sepulchre, where they have lain for countless ages undisturbed. But after

the vast lapse of time they are brought forth with a power of resistance such as they never* enjoyed during their lives. Thus God has preserved the records (to be discovered in his own good time) of the innumerable revolutions that this earth of ours has undergone—records that are intelligible to those who seek after truth.

After the two had made sure that there was nothing more of interest to be found at this point, they made their way slowly toward the river, stopping here and there to pluck a fern or gather a bit of the moss, which was not only beautifying the rocks and trees but the solid ground as well. So that by the time they had reached the level ground they had not only filled the basket that the boy had brought along for that purpose, but his pockets and hands as well, besides a large bunch of ferns and autumn leaves which Mary Grey persisted in carrying in spite of his protestations.

They walked along the bank of the river for some distance and watched the swiftly flowing stream, and then started toward the house on a new route. This was across the beautiful wooded pasture land which extended from one end of the Colonel's land to the other and from the stables to the water's edge. Here the gentle, mild-eyed Jerseys, which were his especial pride, were contentedly feeding upon the crisp, new grass which the late autumn rains had encouraged into luxuriance, and were lazily switching the flies.

"I have scarcely touched a cow since I left my country home, when I was just sixteen years of age," said Mrs. Grey. "I must give that beautiful creature one pat." But she was far from being satisfied with one touch of the silken hide, and stood stroking and fondling her while she manifested her approval by rubbing her black and yellow nose against her sleeve.

By this time the sun in its western course gave warning that the already much shortened afternoon was several hours old, and they hastened their steps for the remainder of the distance; but by the time that they had reached the house it was already four o'clock, so after partaking of a hurried lunch the carriage was brought to the door and the boys were preparing to take their guest back to the village.

"Oh, Mrs. Grey, I had almost forgotten our trilobite. Is it not a perfect one?" said Johnny, going down into his pocket and producing the little mollusk for inspection.

"It is about the best one that we have found on the place," said his father, returning it to him. "You may give it to Mrs. Grey as a souvenir of her first visit to our place," he went on, turning kindly toward that lady as he spoke.

"I intended that it should be hers; I was only carrying it to the house for her," said the boy, laying the relic into Mrs. Grey's hand. "You are welcome. It was just as much yours as mine, anyway," he said as she thanked him.

"You have all been so kind to me, and I have passed the day so happily," she said, turning to the little group with a world of gratitude in her eyes, "that I hardly know how to express my thanks."

"The only demonstration of gratitude that we ask for on your part, is that you enjoy yourself to the utmost on every visit that you make to our place," said Aunt Minnie. "I wish you a pleasant drive back to town."

"You need not drive back over the same road by which you came this morning, boys," said Colonel Wilkins. "You can give the lady an opportunity to see the country from the other side of the river."

"O no; I believe that I would rather go back by the

same road over which we came. I do not believe that I would ever care to go any other," said Mrs. Grey enthusiastically.

"The way you came," said Colonel Wilkins, "is the short cut, and you can go over it many times yet," and he smiled at her earnest face, "and I do not believe that you will be disappointed if you do go the other way."

She offered no further resistance, and soon they were on their way along the north road. They viewed the same landscape that they had seen in the morning, only from a different point of view, but it was none the less interesting and beautiful. The sun in its Indian summer splendor was nearing the horizon, and its rays were slanting over the tops of the red and yellow trees, and was making them look like a vast bed of quivering coals. Farther down was a dark line which marked the river, which was mostly in the shadows of the big sycamores that lined the banks and grew to the water's edge. About midway between the highway and the river there was a tremendous commotion in the tree tops, where the blackbirds were holding one of their annual series of meetings, and seemed to be in their most garrulous manner discussing pro and con the advisability of starting immediately for quarters where the weather could be relied upon. They appeared to be doing all their voting by acclamation, and most of the sly chaps succeeded in getting in three, four or a half dozen votes apiece. When this was discovered, each one seemed to be taking it upon himself to restore order and decorum, and since what is everybody's business is nobody's business, they presented a very noisy meeting. After vainly trying to decide the weighty matter under consideration at once, they voted an adjournment, the assembly to meet in another part of the woods later on, where they could no doubt come to a

much speedier agreement. After they had dismissed themselves, they flew away together, but there were nevertheless many expressions of dissatisfaction and vexation as they went. They flew across the road and directly over the heads of our friends, and there seemed to be no end to the now thoroughly boistrous medley, who seemed to be trying to fully determine the next place of meeting as they went, and from all appearances this was no easy matter.

"It would be hard to tell which view is the most beautiful," said Mary Grey in answer to a question from one of the boys. "No wonder that your father was confident that I would enjoy this drive, but I believe that I like the south road best after all, where there is a nearer view of the river. Distance may lend enchantment to some, but there are so many things just out of reach and sight in this world. Do you know that I sometimes wish we could get a sight of heaven to encourage us when we grow weary? And then it would guide us to take the only safe and sure way. If we had not Christ's love to illuminate our journey we would indeed be groping in the dark."

This was said more to herself than to her listeners, and consequently called for no answer. The drive was soon over. Oh, what a happy, care-free day it had been. Her friends noticed the color on her cheeks, and the brightness of her eyes, and were pleased.

"It works like a charm," they thought. "Some of her sadness will wear away in time, and she will be happy in a degree." They asked her to play and sing, a request with which she complied at once, but she soon excused herself and went to her own room. Her exercise in climbing and walking, and the drive through the bracing autumn air, were beginning to tell upon her, and the drowsy god was fast gaining the mastery.

The experience of the day had had the effect to dispel all weariness of heart and brain, and had left in its stead only a physical weariness, such as is only known to a healthy body. But the most perfect health demands the most profound rest, and usually asserts its claims in such a way as to compel acquiescence. So after placing herself in the hands of her God in a simple petition, she soon had her head upon her pillow.

"I know that Robert would be glad to know how well I enjoyed this day," she thought, and then dropped into such a sleep of restfulness and peace as many sin-hardened, care-burdened soul would give worlds to enjoy.

Beautiful thought, that the path of rectitude will insure for us, through a clear conscience, such rare jewels as all the combined wealth of the world fail to buy.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE CONVERSATION.

WINTER was here. The old storm king had come on his trip from the North and brought with him his usual array of attendants, and the cortege had brought death and destruction in its train. Jack Frost had played sad havoc among the smaller vegetation. He had greeted them coldly, and there were none so bold that they could long bear up under his icy manner, but hung their heads in humble submission to his will, and were soon withered by his scorn. Then when young whirlwind could stop long enough in his gambols among the tree tops, where he was without ceremony robbing them branch and twig of their vestage and scattering the leaves in total abandon to the ground, to bestow his exalted attention upon anything that grew so near the earth, he gathered the blackened and forsaken flora in his arms sublime, and tossed them unfeelingly upon an unseemly pile, or in a winrow along some unpretentious fence. Then the merciless sleet descended until the grass and flowers, which had so recently been the pride of the eye, were soaked to the heart, then frozen into a solid mass, there to lie, so that by the time the next summer's sun has softened it with its rays, it has undergone the process of change which nature has decreed and again adds to the renewed splendor of the earth's verdure.

Now and then a belated bird, one that the great army of summer songsters had left behind them in their southward flight, would twitter faintly or pipe shrilly, as if in distress, to show that one of the forces of that giant from

the snowbound regions had been brought to play upon them, and had tried to penetrate their coats of down.

And from the number of great coats, furs and mufflers that had been brought from their summer quarters, one would be led to judge that God's highest type of *fauna*, the *genus homo*, was not exempt from his majesty's chilling influence, but the greatest precaution was no bar against his strenuous efforts, and the November blasts went piercing through the thickest apparel, on through the shivering flesh to the very bone. Could it ever have been so penetrating in the dead of winter? It must surely be colder than the thermometer registers. So the people hurried along to the more congenial clime of their hearthstone.

Fred. Alton knew that further delay was out of the question. He had been putting off their return to the city until there was not a remnant of an excuse left. His wife was visibly affected by the cold and damp, but yet he was loth to go.

They were to go on Thursday evening, and it was already Tuesday evening. They had all been out to Colonel Wilkins' beautiful country house that day, and the Colonel, his sister, and his two sons were to return the visit by spending the next day in town. The young man had not enjoyed the day, and wished that he could avoid meeting the country gentleman on the next. He did not like the keen, penetrating gaze of those earnest eyes. He never had enjoyed his society so little on his previous visits, but today he had been a source of irritation to him. He could not see what the ladies had seen about him to admire, that they should have been so enthusiastic on their way home. He had entertained them as only a thorough gentleman knows how, but it seemed that those calm, far-sighted eyes were ever following him. He was

sitting alone, with his heart at war with the fates, when he heard the sound of music. He was soon in the parlor and standing beside the player, and when the plump but skillful fingers had touched the last key he put up his hand in an authoritative way and pulled the cover over the piano.

"I thought that you liked music," said Mary Grey, looking up with some surprise at his unusual manner.

"Oh, it will do as a makeshift for people who have nothing to say; but I think, for people with mind and intelligence, conversation is much more interesting."

"Do you mean to say that you have been simply tolerating all this playing that we have been doing? Then it was wrong to pretend to enjoy it to the last."

"Oh, it is nothing to be so serious about," he said, laughing at her earnestness. "I did enjoy it. Of course, I always did prefer some women's music to their conversation. Indeed, I thought that that gift was nature's apology for their lack of conversational powers."

"If you had not come in and disturbed me, I would be playing still," she said, quickly.

"I was just about to say that with you it is different. Your music, no doubt, is good, but your talk is much better; but I feel too cross tonight for music or talk."

"Then why did you come in at all?" she said, with more trouble than resentment in her eyes. She did not like praise from any one, much less a man, and that man a comparative stranger. "But what makes you so cross?" she said, more kindly. "Something else must have gone wrong. I don't believe that your wife has been scolding you."

"Nothing has gone wrong. Everything goes so provokingly right with me. I wish my wife would scold me once in a while. It would break up the monotonous rounds of life."

She never had seen him in such a humor, and she laughed at the turn his mood had taken. "Who ever heard of a man wishing that his wife would turn into a shrew? You would soon be glad to have her regain her old sweet temper."

"I would not even like to imagine myself the husband of a shrew. I would not even figure well in a play in that role; but I do admire women with pluck and spirit," he said, looking at her keenly. But he again saw that troubled, questioning look in her eyes, and he quickly turned the subject. The weather, he thought, will be a safe topic.

"Mrs. Grey, are you sorry or glad that the winter is here?"

"I am usually ready for the change when it comes, and am glad," was her answer.

"How fortunate you are to be in possession of such a contented spirit. You are certainly thrice blessed by nature."

"But I am not always so well satisfied with the ways of providence," she said, pathetically. "I always thought winter the happiest season of the year, because then the family ties seem bound closer, the busiest time seems past, and the family circle see so much more of each other's society. Winter always did suggest long, cozy evenings to me."

"Yes, that is true," said the man, meditatively; "but don't you know that while happy families have an opportunity for increased enjoyment in each other's society, the unhappy and ill-assorted are also thrown more together? During the cold, winter months their comfort necessitates their coming into closer contact, and then their petty differences develop into full-grown brawls and fights. There is more crime in winter among the lower classes

than any other time. And then the opportunity for the unprincipled and the attractions for the unwary feet are greater during those long winter nights."

"I have had so little experience with crime in my life that I had hardly given that a thought, but I have been more thoughtful for the poor and needy. Although I have seen very little of their suffering, I have often wished that I could share my own comforts with them when the wintry winds are blowing and food and fuel are high."

"You may well wish always to be spared the sight of the privation and want that those hard winters naturally occasion, and may be thankful that you live in a small place, where little of it is known. It is more conducive to one's own peace of mind."

"I feel differently about it. I feel that it would be cowardly in me to remain away from suffering and want simply to spare myself, if I could in any way help them; but if I should go among them in my present circumstances, I would soon be one of their number instead of a source of relief. I wish that I had some of the money that the wealthy do not know how to handle, or even an opportunity to earn more. I would not ask those unfortunate creatures if their present needs were brought about by misfortune or mismanagement; the simple fact that they were hungry and had nowhere to get the necessary food would be enough. I would make it my life work. I feel so idle and helpless, as it is. When I have saved a little, I will go and do what I can, be it little or much."

He smiled at her enthusiasm, but he dealt it a blow by saying: "You will never earn enough to give anything away. It looks out of place for a woman to support herself, and a lady who has friends who would be glad to do it for her should not even persist in doing so."

“As long as I am able-bodied I would not let a brother or sister support me, no matter how willing and able they might be, much less a lady, upon whom I have no claim, like your sister. As long as I have health I expect to help not only myself, but others that are less fortunate. God’s plans are more consistent. He would not have put women into this busy world and denied them the right to share the many duties which living in it necessitates; much less would He have given them equal needs with men, without giving them the poor privilege of supplying those needs, even though the world may try to frown it down. The time will come—nay, must come—when woman’s efforts will not only be appreciated, but her rights respected; when a woman will not be considered as an intruder, much less an invader, in any of the occupations of life, but a co-worker, and without the stigma that is at the present time more or less attached to the woman who toils for her bread. Are we of less value to the Creator than his lower animals? He has not inflicted upon one of them a physical necessity without giving them not only the instinct but the opportunity to supply it.”

“Let it be right or wrong, the line of distinction nevertheless exists between the woman who is cared for and the one who must care for herself. My first thought would be not to exert my puny influence against this unwritten law (which, however, is stronger than the decision of the judge of any supreme bench), but to avoid the natural consequence of violating it; for any attempt at trying to overcome its influence would be like attacking a stone fortress with a pop-gun. It would not only disclose the hopelessness of the attempt, but also the folly of one so inexperienced. You speak as if my sister was the only friend you had. There are others who

would no doubt help you to avoid a life which could not fail to become burdensome to a lady of refinement, no matter how independent her notions may be."

"The only three from whom I would have accepted aid are dead. They were my husband and my parents," she said sadly, without looking up. "But I don't see why a lady need lose her refinement or be less a lady because providence may have made it incumbent upon her to maintain herself; and I can not see why a woman, whose existence depends upon her own exertions just the same as an industrious man, should not wield a better influence upon society, for no brain that is not kept busy with worthy aims and thoughts is proof against the unworthy and harmful."

"I have not the slightest doubt that your reasoning is correct, but since we are living in the present age we must deal with present environments. Women are not judged by the world by what their moral standard or aims might be, but those who must work for a living are supposed to be like men: willing to do so in the easiest possible manner, which is never strictly in accordance with right."

"I know that from a worldly point of view we are poor, helpless creatures, but God in our weakness has given us a strength that will prevail, if we only put our trust in Him. Man, whose judgment is fallible, can after all only exert its influence over time, and if we do not get our just dues here, God, who is justice itself, will give it to us in eternity. And since we are put into this world solely to prepare for the next, we may well keep up our courage and struggle on."

"If my trip to the better world would lead me over such a rocky and tedious road, I am afraid that I would never reach my destination."

"God's ways are always wise, and that may be the reason why you were born into an easy life; but none of us will reach heaven unless we show ourselves worthy of it, and your entrance may not be an easy one."

He looked at her quickly to see how much this last remark might mean. Did she, after all, have the power to discern his thoughts? But he could see that she did not mean to be personal; and she went on kindly:

"But He will try none of us beyond our strength."

"Do you mean that those men and women who fall are not tried beyond their strength?"

"I mean that to those who put their trust in Him he gives his sustaining grace. Were it not so, my faith might have received a shock from which it would never have recovered."

"How far do you think God's sustaining grace will suffice with people who are suffering from hunger and cold and are not afforded the opportunity to provide for themselves honorably?"

"It is well that we are not given the right to mete out justice to each other, for I would be led to visit the iniquities of those poor unfortunates upon those who would have an abundance and to spare, were their lives three times as long as they are, and do not raise a hand to prevent the wrong into which others are helplessly driven."

"That is rather an evasive way to answer my question. Do you not think they have been tried beyond their powers of resistance?"

"They have, no doubt; but they may not have had their trust in God. And besides, they may not, in the past, have employed the talents that He entrusted them with, to provide for themselves. If they had, some of them might have avoided their present needy condition."

The man smiled. He had been steadily leading toward

this point. "Then if their present circumstances are due to their own carelessness and lack of thrift, is it right, according to your judgment, that they should expect aid from those who are more deserving?"

"Circumstance has placed a great many in possession of wealth who would not have it if it had depended upon their own exertions or worth. When Christ came upon earth, it was not to show a preference for the worthy, but it was the unworthy that He came to save. Then would we not be holding the little that we could do as of more importance than His precious life by denying succor to the many deserving ones, lest we might give aid to one who did not deserve it? What is our own judgment compared to the unalterable Truth?"

The young man was in no mood to hear the commonplace talk of the evening, so he left the room by one door just as the rest of the family were about to enter by another. He could see that Mrs. Grey's reasoning was sound, as measured by the laws of God and His dealing with His unworthy subjects. He could also see that she had no suspicion of the point that he had tried, at different times, to lead to but could not reach. But this very shield of purity, which was wrapped so closely about her, made him all the more determined to the achievement of his ends.

Many a man has been led into wrong by a former incumbrance or alliance, and the time might not be far distant when he could right the wrong.

He drew a letter from his pocket. "I wonder which one of those hags masquerading in saints' attire wrote this. They thought it necessary to warn my wife against an unsuspecting woman. They would injure her and do her irreparable wrong simply through jealousy and spite. But it is well this little missive reached me before it did

its destination, for should her suspicions once be aroused it would be hard to calm them, and that would only make existence drearier; and if Mrs. Grey would get a hint of it, I would never see her again. Her very innocence would take up the cry of alarm, and she would fly from her tormentor."

CHAPTER XX.

THE RETURN TO THE CITY.

THURSDAY had come and gone. The Altons had gone, and the old peace and quiet had returned to the home of Mrs. Ferris; and with it had come the sense of relief so well known, no matter how much we may regret, at the time, the departure of our guests. It is not because we are tired of their society, but because it is a comfort to be alone after a lengthy visit.

Mrs. Grey had received an urgent invitation to make a visit to the city during the holidays; something she did not promise to do, however. "As much as I would be sure to enjoy it, I must deny myself the pleasure of anything so expensive. Whenever circumstances place me in a position to be able to do good in the city I will go, but not before then."

"You could not fail to do good wherever you go," said Mrs. Alton. "You have, although unintentionally, made me ashamed of my helplessness, and my husband shall see in future how much your lesson has improved me."

"She could not fail to do good were all spirits as guiltless as yours," thought her husband, looking from one to the other.

Mr. and Mrs. Ferris might possibly run into town for a short visit during the winter. So, with many good wishes and cordial handshakes, they were gone.

The satisfaction that Mrs. Alton experienced at once more being in her own home was unbounded. She was well pleased with her visit, but at home she could have the undivided attention of her husband without appearing childish and unreasonable, and she did not want to

be that. She had at times, in a helpless, undefined way, felt the disparagement of associating with one who was both physically and intellectually her superior. But now she was at home, and would not appear so insignificant in her husband's eyes; not that he had by either word or sign shown to her that he had noticed the difference, but a woman's eyes are keener when she loves, and she tried vainly to shake off the old helplessness. But after several futile attempts she drifted back into her old way, which, after all, was so peaceful and happy, and she allowed her husband to wait upon her more than ever. She seemed to be growing weaker and her ailment to be taking form. It was an unusually severe winter, and was not only telling upon delicate constitutions, but the suffering among the poor was intense, and the tender-hearted lady was pleased with the unusual interest that her husband was taking in all the attempts to relieve the want and distress which a cold winter makes so common among the poor of any city.

"Some of the philanthropists are raising a private fund for the poor, and would like to have some reliable Christian lady to take charge of it and use it where it will do the most good," Mr. Alton said to his wife one day late in January. "You know there are still three months of cold weather before us. Those aid societies may be systematic, but their system fails to reach the most needy, sometimes, and for that reason this little sum is being raised. I believe we had better write to Mrs. Grey to come. She would not only be doing good to others, but would receive a salary besides."

"I don't believe that the salary would be any inducement in the matter. I don't believe that she would want to be paid for doing good. But I will write to her at once. I believe she would be happier, and it would help her to forget her sorrows."

"If Mrs. Grey has to earn her own living long, she will begin to think a salary very much of an inducement. As much as her pluck and self-confidence are to be admired, she need not try to give me the impression that all that keeps her from moving the world is because it did not need a change. In an age which tries the bravery of the staunchest hearted of the men who must work for a living, a lady who supports herself is doing more than should be expected of her, without helping others. But when you mention the pay that she is to receive, you had better add that it would give her an opportunity to accomplish what she is striving for in a shorter time."

"I never heard of them offering a salary for the distribution of charity before. Usually some benevolently disposed person takes it upon herself or himself. But I am glad for Mrs. Grey's sake. She will be able to get away from Cloverdale and its meddlesome people for a time. But, Fred.," she said, as a new thought suggested itself, "this income will only be temporary. Can she afford to give up her pupils? Her present employment, although not very lucrative, is steady and sure."

"You need not hesitate to write on that account. My sister will take her back, and I have no doubt that Colonel Wilkins would wait on her a year if necessary. She only has two others. She can afford to lose them. I don't believe there will be any occasion for her to go back. We have the poor always with us, and there are plenty of kind-hearted people who would be willing to give the year round, if they had any assurance that their money would be put to a good purpose."

"One thing I must know before I write to her, and that is that she shall be furnished with a good home; or will we invite her to make her home with us?" and Mrs. Alton looked at her husband as if she was asking his

permission, but with an earnest hope that he would refuse it.

"Well, since I have been appointed treasurer and general manager of this little project, we can settle that part of the affair to suit ourselves. You can use your own pleasure about inviting her here. In deciding this question, however, we should remember that she entertained us on sufferance once, and also the disagreeable result of her kindness to us."

"I have not forgotten," said Mrs. Alton, "and I would be pleased to have her here if I was only stronger; but as it is, it is so nice to have you all to myself, and I believe the contrast between us two would make me feel weaker now, and might have a deprecating effect upon me in the eyes of my husband, and you know I could not bear that." And the same look came into her eyes that they had had once before, the time when she was talking to Mrs. Grey of the possibility of losing her husband. She laid her slender, transparent little hand over his much larger and stronger one in a way which was half confidence and half entreaty. "I don't want to be childish or selfish, but we always did think that it was nicest to be alone. Then, we don't know—the time may not be long that we will be permitted to remain together, and I do so want you to myself while it lasts."

This was the first time Fred. Alton had heard his wife talk in that tone. She had been thinking seriously of her illness, even though it had seemed that she would drift on toward the end of her life like a beautiful butterfly and be light-hearted and happy to the last. The thought smote the young man to the heart. All the old love and tenderness came rushing back as he gathered her up in his strong arms and laid her gently upon a settee, while he knelt before her, stroking her hands.

“Oh, you are not going to leave me! We will spend many long, happy years together. I will not leave you go—I will hold you back!” he said, almost hopelessly, as he looked into her beautiful, loving eyes and then at her thin face and emaciated form.

Death had indeed marked her for his own. It might be months, or even years, but he had sent his advance agent to announce his approach, and the language of the messenger could not be misunderstood.

The young man could not reproach himself for any lack of kindness toward his wife, or for any outward sign of difference of feeling, but he knew that a wild, undefined fear had been aroused in her heart on several occasions, as if she had by womanly intuition divined that her helplessness had lately begun to pall upon his patience, and feared that she was becoming a burden to him; and the truth of her suspicions was as a poisoned arrow to his conscience. He had known her before he married her, and his choice had not been controlled by any outward influence. If he wanted a wife with more mind and energy, he should not have married her. He should have left her in the counting-room and in her home. Some other man would have married her that would have been satisfied with her, and she would have been happy. And then the charge she had become was partly due to his own treatment of her. He had acted toward her more like she was a child or doll than an intelligent companion. Then, in his remorse, he had arrived at the same conclusion that he had once before: it would be a brute, indeed, who would neglect her; and he said to her in his old genial tone:

“No, we will not invite Mrs. Grey to live with us; but it is not because you are going to die, but because you are going to live and we would rather continue our old

happy life. And we have always been happy, haven't we? I have never treated you in a way to cause you to be otherwise, have I?"

"You have always been kindness itself, and I don't see how I could possibly have been happier," and she looked at him gratefully. "Only make me as happy the remainder of my stay here and I will be satisfied, should my time be long or short; and I would not try to put a restraint upon your conduct when I am gone."

She had always thought to ask him to remain single the rest of his life for her sake, and she hardly knew why she spoke as she did; but she thought, humbly, "How could I expect to be that much to him."

Fred. Alton had it in his heart to tell his wife not to write that letter to Mrs. Grey; but, he thought, that would be almost an acknowledgement that I have also noticed the contrast, which could no longer fail to be painful to her. So the letter was written—an urgent request, which was made all the more urgent by an appeal to her sympathy and by painting in glowing letters the good she could accomplish with her salary. They wrote nothing about the home that she should occupy while in the city, thinking that could be attended to later, but only stated the case plainly and asked her if she could not be induced to come if the necessary arrangements could be made.

Although the physicians could find no trace of any organic disease, Mrs. Alton continued to be about the same: like a house-plant which had been shielded from the elements, which would have had a tendency to strengthen it, until it was too late, and it had become so tender and delicate that a change would be as certain death as a continuation in the heated atmosphere and excessive sunshine.

CHAPTER XXI.

MARY GREY'S EXPERIENCE AS A WRITER.

A VISIBLE degree of abstraction had taken possession of Mrs. Grey since the city people's departure. When not engaged in conversation, she seemed to be trying to solve some ponderous, troublesome problem—as, indeed, she was. She was thinking over and over, "Is it right for me to stay here and enjoy all these comforts, when so many of God's creatures are crying vainly for the necessities of life?" That part of the solution would have been comparatively easy, but then came the most troublesome part of the enigma: "If I did go, how would I be enabled to help them? It would be next to impossible for me to get pupils in a strange place, and how else could I earn enough to support even myself?"

Then a new thought came to her. She had always had a taste for literature. In her school days her compositions had always received the highest praise. Why not turn that talent into good account? She would write an article on some interesting subject and send it to the city paper.

She chose her subject, and wrote on hopefully to the end. When she had finished, she was satisfied that it was fully as good as much of the reading matter that the daily papers contained. She showed the manuscript to Mrs. Ferris, of whom she had made a confidante, and that lady was more than pleased with the brightness and thought that it contained. The article was mailed, and one of the ladies was as much interested as the other in watching the papers and for the answer to her letter.

In the course of a few days she received a newspaper, and the same mail brought a letter from the editor, prais-

ing her for her ability, and saying: "By reading over the columns of the paper you will find that I have made use of your article, but I am sorry to say that I am allowed very little funds to pay for such contributions, but would be pleased if you would command my individual aid in finding a market for your writings."

She was a little surprised to see that instead of its being a type-written letter, such as are commonly sent by newspaper firms, it was a neat sheet of business paper, written with pen and ink, and bore the writer's private address.

She showed the letter to Mrs. Ferris, and when she drew her attention to the above named peculiarities, the lady answered by saying: "I consider that as a compliment to you. He must have considered your effort worthy, or he would not have shown you the attention that he did. Editors are usually so curt in their business correspondence. If I were in your place, I would write another piece and send it. Tell him that you do not expect much, and would be glad to accept whatever he sees fit to send you."

Thus encouraged, Mrs. Grey made a second attempt to gain recognition in a profitable manner in the great world of newspaper work. She had not long to wait until she received an answer to her second letter. This covered three pages of business paper, and was written with a cordiality uncalled for. He was very sorry that he was not authorized to pay for such articles, and since the paper was published by a stock company he would have to abide by the rules, much as he would like to help her. Then he wound up by saying: "But if you will accept my personal assistance, you can obtain the same by addressing me or calling on me at my apartments." Then followed name, hotel, and number of room.

Mrs. Grey was bewildered. "I do not like the tone of the letter," she said to Mrs. Ferris. "How can he assist me if he can not pay me for my writing, and he has said that such a thing is impossible? There was nothing in my letter to warrant such familiarity. I am glad that he enclosed it with his, or I might think that I had possibly written something that encouraged him to answer as he did."

"I consider the fact that he returned your letter as the strongest evidence against him. Why did he do such an unusual thing if he did not want to impress you with the thought that he did not wish to consider your correspondence as strictly business," said Mrs. Ferris.

"It seems so strange. I would hardly have believed that a man could be so base as to thrust his attentions upon a woman because she asks him for employment. Do evil-minded men consider that as a license to approach us? I will never write to him again."

"But I would not be so easily discouraged," said Mrs. Ferris. "I would write something else and send it to some other paper. I still think that it was the merits of your articles that attracted that man's attention."

"But it is not attention that I want, even if it was well meant." But she concluded to try once more.

By the time the two women had read the answer to her third application they were both discouraged. The writer commenced by advising her never to drop any occupation that she might be engaged in to take up writing for the press, for it was impossible for beginners to earn enough to pay for their paper and the pens that they wore out, much less support themselves. "But," he went on, "a woman who does not care to do anything but write can find some other way of replenishing her purse."

This had the effect of driving all the literary ambition

out of her head. "Have I learned all the hard lessons that are necessary to take me through the remainder of my life, or are there still some more in store for me?" she thought bitterly. "I am so glad Robert did not know what was before me. If he had, it would have made the parting all the harder for him. I am so glad that that could be spared him, since he could not stay nor had the power to ward off the evil. God sends us word through the Bible that we should judge not, but it seems that all humanity were making a universal effort to appoint themselves as judges over their fellow-men, and I will soon begin to believe that our sex are all held as suspects. I hope that I may never become cynical, but oh, it is so hard to bear. But Robert would have me be brave, and if I had no trials there would be no occasion for courage."

"You have had so much to depress you lately," said Mrs. Ferris, "that it is no wonder that you are almost overcome with discouragements, but in time you will be yourself again. You will buckle on your armor of defense, which will only become the brighter and stronger by coming in close contact with opposing forces."

"Be it far from me to murmur or despair, but I can well see why so many people never have the strength and courage to accomplish anything and do not rise above the common level. No mind that is influenced by that lower atmosphere and is poisoned by the venom therein contained can ever gain the strength to entertain a high or worthy aim, much less carry it on to success."

"It is a homely phrase, but nevertheless a true one," said Mrs. Ferris, "that they who stop to throw a stone at every dog that barks at them, will never reach their journey's end; and it is only a surprise to me that those who keep themselves in a fever of expectation and walk with fear and trembling, lest perchance their neighbors might

espy something in their conduct to criticise, and then if they should ever cause comment, let it be in justice or an injustice, feel that they are undone for time and for eternity, get through the world as they do. And when we stop to think that this is, after all, the prime factor, we are not surprised at the clearly defined dividing line between the intelligent and thoughtful minded and the unthinking masses."

"I think the only way to attain that high standard that the Creator has endowed us with a power to reach, is to first make sure that we are in the right and then press on and never allow ourselves to regret or pine over a deed that was actuated by a good impulse," said Mrs. Grey. But she did not know that her power of forbearance was so soon to be tried to the utmost.

One evening, as she was returning from the post office, she met Miss Green, and not knowing that the irate spinster had sworn vengeance against her, she joined her. When they came to within a few doors of Miss Green's home, one of the women of the neighborhood was standing on the sidewalk by the side of a young girl who was sitting on the step of one of the houses which were built out to the street, and as they walked up the woman said, "Miss Green, this girl is looking for a place to stay all night. I have no room, but thought you might be willing to keep her." They could not see the face of the girl in the darkness, only the outlines of her form, but her attitude was weariness and dejection itself.

"Where is your home?" asked Miss Green.

The girl answered by giving the name of a small town about ten miles below Cloverdale.

"Why are you here and hunting a room at this time of night?"

"I came to town to work for Dr. Minor's, but they

don't want me for another week. I want to find a place to stay tonight, and am going back home tomorrow. I have been trying for the last hour, but everybody seems to be either full or torn up or something."

Miss Green asked the girl a few more questions and then said, "We have no room to keep strangers at present," and started to walk on. The other woman entered her own door at the same time.

"Can it be possible," thought Mary Grey, as she still stood by the side of the girl, "that those two women can enter their own homes, say their prayers in all self-righteousness and then go to bed, while one of their sex is sitting in the cold on a door-step in the street?" "Come," she said to the girl, "I know a lady who keeps strangers," and she started with the girl toward the home of Deacon Hill. She knew that the deacon's good old wife was capable of doing a great many things without letting her left hand know what her right hand had done, and had a room that was used for nothing but to shelter such strangers as might present themselves at their door.

Mrs. Grey had seen nothing but a weary woman who wanted a place to rest. All the questions that she would have asked had been answered in a plausible manner, so she walked quietly along by her side without any compunction of conscience, and soon had her at the door of Mrs. Hill, who agreed at once to keep her for the night.

But the serenity of her mind was to be disturbed before she reached her home. She had no sooner started from the doorstep with the girl when Miss Green turned round and took in the situation at a glance. "She does not know that that is an outcast. That will start a pretty talk for her to be seen on the street with such a character, but I wouldn't care if the whole town saw her."

She lingered in the open door until she saw Mrs. Grey

coming back, and then stepped out saying, "You will have yourself-talked about in a pretty way by taking up with such a character. She has been about town for the last week, and is of the lowest type. I should think you would have known that a respectable woman would not be hunting lodging at this time of night. I would not be in your shoes for the whole town."

"I did nothing wrong. I knew nothing about her and supposed her story a true one," said Mrs. Grey, bewildered at the storm of words that were being hurled at her head.

"The reason that you knew nothing about her, is why you should not have taken up with her."

"Miss Green, I wish you would not express yourself that way. I did not take up with her. I could not have gone to bed with one of my own sex sitting in the cold on a door-step, and I simply took her to a kind lady that I knew would keep her. It was only eight o'clock. Circumstances may have placed more than one woman on the street at that hour."

"I should like to know what else it was if you did not take up with her. You associated with her on the street, and every person that saw you together will think you are no better than she. I don't believe in encouraging evil, and I don't think Mrs. Hill will thank you for bringing such a creature into her house."

"I did not associate with her. I simply conducted her to Mrs. Hill's, and should I think myself too good for that, when Christ came upon earth and gave his precious life for such as she? Any one would know that had I known her character I would never have taken her where I did, and that is all I am sorry for, but I will go back and tell Mrs. Hill and she can use her own judgment about keeping her."

"It is too late now. You had better let her go, only after this when you want to play the saint, show your kindness to a more worthy object."

Mrs. Grey made no reply to this last remark and was soon back at the door of her friend. That lady was surprised to see her back, and after she had heard her errand she said, "I am sorry that it happened as it did, but no one is to blame, It can do me no harm to keep her, so I will not turn her out into the street."

Thus reassured Mrs. Grey went home where she related her evening's adventure to Mrs. Ferris. "What will the people think who saw me with her? They will think it strange, at best, and then I am so sorry on Mrs. Hill's account, but I did not know."

"Of course you knew nothing wrong about the girl. It is a little unfortunate on Mrs. Hill's account, but I would not blame myself or worry if I were you. I don't suppose very many people saw you. Go to bed and get a good night's rest and you will feel better in the morning."

Mrs. Grey went to bed, but did not sleep for a long time. The thought that she, even though it was unconsciously, had imposed upon one of her best friends worried her not a little. The fact that the lady had exonerated her from all blame did not make her mind much easier; and could it be possible that the people who saw them together would judge her by her companion? But at last she fell asleep, and her troubles for the night were ended, but only to begin early the next morning, for Miss Green and Mrs. Jones were at Mrs. Ferris' house betimes. They had never been there before, but since they had a mutual interest in so momentous a subject, they could brave the surprise that such an unusual procedure on their part might occasion.

They began to tell, with all the enthusiasm imaginable, all that they could possibly learn by strenuous effort against the girl.

"I would think," said Mrs. Jones, "that you would have walked away and left her after those two young men drove up and asked her to go riding."

"Well, I did begin to feel that all might not be right, but I asked her who they were, and she said they were her cousins, and I supposed she was telling the truth."

"A very likely story! and to think that a woman of your age was innocent enough to believe it," said Miss Green. "Innocence might be bliss to some, but I would consider it anything else if it got me into such a talk as there is sure to be. I think it is wrong to encourage evil."

"Did Christ encourage evil when he gave His precious life for our sins? Ladies, I wish you would not talk to me as if I had committed some great crime. I did no real harm in taking that poor erring creature to a place of shelter, and what is more, I am liable to do the same thing again, for I lay no claim to being a judge of character, and there is no security against a repetition of the mistake. Miss Green, if you were to invite a company of young people to your house this evening, you no doubt would have those two young men that were in that buggy among them; and if your character and reputation would not be impaired by thus associating with them, I am none the worse for what I have done. God did not punish the woman alone for the transgressions of our foreparents, but turned them both out of the Garden of Eden. Then how can we take it upon ourselves to say to the woman, 'begone, we can not keep you for the night,' and then take the man into our homes and families?"

"Well, if you want to take up with such as her and

disgrace yourself still worse, you can, but we don't care to have such people in our church, that's all!" said Mrs. Jones, as the two moved toward the door. "I don't think that people have a right to be careless and get themselves talked about, and then still want to associate with Christian people who are above reproach."

If Mrs. Grey had bewailed her mistake and looked upon herself as being irreparably injured, Mrs. Jones might have forgiven her the offense, for she did not like to be remiss in Christian forbearance. But this was different. "She acts as if it would be impossible to harm such a high moral character as hers. She must regard herself as infallible."

Mary Grey wondered if she appeared so irretrievably lost in the eyes of all Cloverdale. She wanted to know how much trouble her friend had had with her strange guest, and since this was the day for Bessie's lesson, she would soon be able to find out.

"Have you decided what punishment you would mete out to me?" she said to the lady, as she entered the door.

"And what would I want to punish you for?" was her pleasant interrogative reply; and she looked like anything but a judge who was ready to pronounce a severe sentence.

"For imposing such a great wrong upon you."

"Since you did it innocently, I do not regard it as an imposition; and since you did all in your power to retrieve the wrong and there was no harm done, you need worry no more about it. I only hope you will not be discouraged in well-doing, and neglect something that should be done, and let your head overrule the judgment of your heart."

"I don't believe that there is any occasion for alarm. If it had not been for you, their united efforts would

hardly had the effect of making me sorry that I did not go to bed and leave a woman sitting on the door-step in the night and cold, not a hundred yards away. I am afraid that I will never be well enough schooled in worldly wisdom to make a mistake in the other direction. I thank you for taking such a kindly view of this unfortunate episode, but I am afraid some others who saw me with the girl will not be so lenient."

"I pity such people as can't recognize a lady when they see her," said the old deacon, entering the door. He had heard enough of the conversation to know what it was about, and he went on: "Any one with two eyes and just common sense in their head would have known that you were not associates, even if they did see you together. But in this world it is not only thief catch thief, but it is thief cry thief, when there is no thief but himself about. The girl stayed all night here, and left this morning without any one knowing anything about it but Betsy and me. I guess no one is the worse for it, so worry no more about it. You brought her here, and my wife refused to turn her out after she once was in. That proves to me that there are at least two women in the world who do not ponder over the prudence or advisability of an act until the opportunity to do a good deed of mercy has gone by, and I am proud of you both."

Thus commending them, the good deacon again left the room.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE SLEIGH RIDE.

ONE Tuesday morning Mary Grey stood looking out at the snow. Owing to the intense cold, this was the first heavy fall of the season. The previous scant supply had been driven hither and thither by the cold winds, but now its mantle of purity was over thrift and negligence alike, and all Cloverdale lay buried beneath its white folds. The sleighs were passing and repassing, and the merry jingle of the bells proved exhilarating to many a time-worn, care-burdened heart, as the horses went by, either prancing or like an arrow from a bow, owing to the dispositions of the animals and how their proud spirits would be brought to bear upon by the unusual splendor of their turnouts.

This one watcher stood at the window wondering. She had gone over the lesson, but would there be any occasion for it that day? Would they come for her? She had not been to the country since Christmas, and then they had all been invited there to partake of a good old-fashioned Christmas dinner.

The Colonel had told her then that he regarded a lady's health as being of more value than music lessons, and that on such days as the weather might be too severe they would not come for her. She did not fear the cold, but if a man did not care to venture out, she surely ought to be content to remain indoors. But today was not so bad, even though the wintry air was crisp and clear. She hoped that they would come. The days that she had spent with those genial country people were so cheerful

that she had long since begun to look forward to them with pleasure.

It was growing late, and she had almost given up the faintly hoped for sleigh-ride, when a vehicle with a single occupant drove up to the gate and stopped. "That is no one for me," she thought, as she walked back to the hearth and seated herself in a large comfortable chair. "He is some gentleman on business, and will not be brought in here."

She had just taken up a book and begun to read, when she heard the familiar voice of Colonel Wilkins, who, with Mrs. Ferris, was approaching along the hall. His face had been so concealed by the collar of his great coat that she had not known him.

"It looks almost like a pity to take you away from so much comfort and out into the cold," he said, after greeting her in his usual cordial manner, "but my boys declared that they would forget all that they had ever learned if they did not get to see their teacher today. My horse is restless, so if you are ready we will start at once."

But Mrs. Grey appeared anything but reluctant to go, and almost before he was done talking she was ready, and stood waiting while he spent a few moments talking to Mrs. Ferris.

"The cold will hardly be able to penetrate these wraps, no matter how persistent it may be," she said, in answer to their thoughtfulness for her comfort.

"This is the only horse that we ever drive in single harness, and I was afraid to trust him in the boys' hands," he said, in an apologetic tone, as he helped her into the sleigh; "but you can look out over the landscape and forget that you haven't your old body-guard for a driver, and enjoy the ride. Vain creature!" he said to the

horse, "you seem particularly elated over the glitter of your finery."

"My happiness does not always depend upon the sameness of things, but more often upon a change." Then a pensive look came over her face. "Isn't it strange, the changes which are constantly taking place? Even while we watch we can see them going on—changes in nature, in our lives, and in everything about us. There is one thing that will never change, and that is heaven, and that is the only thing that I can call to mind at present."

Colonel Wilkins had cared little for the society of women since the death of his wife, only such interest as a true gentleman will manifest in his lady friends at all times. He had dedicated his heart and life to the memory of her who twelve years ago had gone from his home to that eternal home above.

While with Mrs. Grey he felt the diffidence so natural to a noble nature while in the presence of an object of the deepest regard. He looked at her intently while she was speaking. There had been a change in her face since he first knew her. The look of deep and unutterable sorrow had softened and given place to one of calm resignation and quiet dignity. She seemed the picture of health and self-reliance, sitting so contentedly by his side. Yes, she was enjoying the drive. Any one who saw her bright eyes and rosy cheeks would feel assured of that. Since he had been called upon to bear a similar affliction, he felt thankful for her sake for the change. It is not that our sorrows grow less, but only that we become better schooled in time to bear them. Time does not heal the wound, but gives us a fortitude to bear the pain instead, he thought, which is so much toward perfecting us for the world to come.

"Did you miss not getting to come to the country last

week, or did you regard it as a rest?" said the man, looking down at his companion with a look of kindly interest in his dark gray eyes.

She looked up at him as if she was surprised that he should use the word rest in connection with anything so pleasant as her weekly visits to the country. Then she smiled. "You know a rest may prove very fatiguing when one is not in need of it. I hardly knew what to do with myself that day. You see how quickly a weak creature can drift into habits."

"That weakness must be natural, since we all seem to have been alike affected with its influence that day."

"Then you think that because a fault is universal or common that is an excuse for it. For my part, I think among all the errors that we are liable to commit, the most prevalent ones are not only the greatest, but the least excusable."

"Rather than to be defeated, I will seek refuge in retreat by calling our attention to the fact that the error that led to this conversation was not a very erroneous one. For my part, I can not regard the fact that we all missed you last Tuesday in the light of a fault."

"Well, since we all seem to have been guilty of the same wrong toward each other, we ought to be willing to call it even. It is so nice to be missed," she added, simply.

"It is seldom that one meets a person whose nature is so frank and unassuming, and yet so deep and thoughtful," thought Colonel Wilkins. "She seems to be one of the few who are not only able to encounter life's battles, but its severest trials as well, without becoming embittered, and to have retained her childlike simplicity through it all."

"You spoke of rest; that is not what I need, but rest

from excessive rest instead. If I could only fill my life with some good and useful work, I would be satisfied. I would never be satisfied to lead the life of a butterfly, as easy as it is supposed to be."

"Yes, I suppose it is about as hard for some to hold their energy in check as it is for others to exert their lagging forces. You would suit better to such a life as is led by the ant or the busy bee. But," he went on, as a sly humor crept into his usually earnest eyes, "don't you think that the ant, which has been extolled from time immemorial as a pattern of wisdom and industry, shows a decided lack of faith? You know that 'Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof,' and 'Behold the lilies of the field; they toil not, neither do they spin.'"

"My ambition," was her earnest answer, "is above either that of the ant or the bees, and since you can find no passage of Scripture to prove to me that it is wrong to lay up treasures in heaven, I would prefer to pattern after the industrious habits of those busy creatures."

The horse was fresh and swift and the termination of their journey put an end to their conversation.

This was the longest that the now thoroughly good friends had not seen each other since their first acquaintance, and the pleasure of again being together was mutual and was manifested by their perfectly easy and sincere intercourse.

"I told father this morning that I was forgetting my lessons and a great deal depended upon seeing you today," said John, with a look of boyish appreciation.

"I am afraid that if you depend too much upon me you will be disappointed at the result," said Mrs. Grey, but she nevertheless smiled at him in a pleased way. "The lesson of self-reliance is one of the first essentials to success in anything. The benefit that we may derive from

the exertions of others can only be temporary at best. The strength that we acquire by the exercise of our own powers will be wanting."

"How plainly we see that manifested every day," said Colonel Wilkins. "Take the rich man as an example. In the management of his wealth, the one who has gained a competence through years of toil and self denial will show the wisdom gained by his many struggles, and expend the benefits in a prudential way, while the one who comes into his possessions through inheritance will spend with a lavish hand that would strike consternation and dismay to the heart of him who laid the foundation of his wealth; or the one who wins riches suddenly by what is termed a lucky stroke—he who, by the stroke of a pen transfers not only the hard-earned money but the very necessities of life of the many into his own coffer; and then, devoid of principle, he will go on in a way that will not only exhaust his money, but his self-respect and manhood as well, and a hopeless death at the end of a hardened life will be the reward of the injustice."

"Yes," said Mary Grey, "God will, in His own good time and way, visit His retribution upon the cruel and heartless even though our earthly laws are handled by their representative in a way to favor the moneyed and grasping. Not all things that we have a right to do are right."

The boys had hoped that their father would regard this second trip of the animal as safe enough for them to make, but they could judge from various little signs as the time approached, that he was expecting to go. So they were not surprised when he, at what to them seemed an early hour, again had himself in readiness. "I will go early," he said, "so as to give Mrs. Grey an opportunity to see more of the country."

"Father must think more of showing her the country than of taking her home," said John, as he saw them start in the opposite direction.

"He may be like you and enjoy being with Mrs. Grey," said the older brother in a teasing way. "You seem to fancy that no one has a right to her society but yourself. I would never hang around any one like you do her. Even if a person does come handy once in a while, that does not keep them from becoming tiresome at times."

"I thank you," was his half angry reply; "I do not hang around her. I am never with her only when she asks me, and if I was a lady I would never invite any one or pretend that I wanted them when I did not, and I don't believe that she would either."

"No," said Aunt Minnie, coming to the rescue, "Mrs. Grey does not pretend; she likes you both. No true gentleman will receive the regards and friendship of a lady in a depreciative way, but will strive to make himself worthy of them instead; and since a gentleman is a gentle boy grown to manhood, you can not be too careful of the habits you form."

"I hope I do not lack in manly qualities, Aunt Minnie. I was only teasing John," said Will, coloring but not resenting the reproof.

"I know you do not. You both show the fruits of your father's example and training, but you should not try to discourage your brother's thoughtfulness of Mrs. Grey's comfort and happiness; for many a noble nature has been warped and stunted by this thoughtless and harmful practice of joking. Only the boy that can be kind and attentive to a lady older than himself will ever make himself worthy of one of his own age."

"Aunt Minnie, you certainly could not mean that a boy of my age should begin to think of a wife."

"The man who shows himself worthy of a wife, only when he has one in view, is not worthy of one at all, and you are never too young to conduct yourself in a way that would attract the attention of the kind of woman that you will wish to merit when you are a man."

"I do not think that I particularly needed a scolding, but I thank you for your timely hints and suggestions, and will try to profit by them."

"Nor did I mean to scold you, but I see so many who think that the fact of their being boys entitles them to give their rudeness full sway; and if it happens to be directed toward any of his girl acquaintances, it is through no fault of their own, but she is to blame for permitting it. And this feeling, which is so manifest in the small boy, grows with his growth and strengthens with his strength, and in such a degree, that by the time he is a man grown, he thinks the fact that he is a man gives him the right to act in a way that if he is honest he can scarcely respect himself, and to assume a slighting air of indifference, and still regard the respect of women as his just dues."

"Aunt Minnie, I will soon begin to think that you are afraid for our future," said Will.

"None of our characters are proof against impressions, and our futures are only assured in proportion to our willingness to renew our security daily and hourly by our conduct, but I am far from meaning to be personal, and I hope that the memory of your mother, together with the life of your father, will continue to influence you both in a way that you will never forget yourself, and always show yourself worthy of the highest type of womanhood."

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE DRIVE.

COLONEL WILKINS had said that he would start early to give Mrs. Grey an opportunity to see the country, but it was to serve a double purpose, for, he had several hours of pleasure for himself in view; for he thought: "Although she has had all the experience that both perfect happiness and the deepest sorrow can bring, she still has all the innocence and freshness of a young girl, and one hour in her society can not only make one forget the frailties of human nature and see only its strength and beauty, but alike to forget the number of mile-stones he has passed and the ground gone over between (sometimes with light and joyful step and sometimes with a weary tread), and make him feel as if those years were still spread out before him."

He had been in the habit of regarding himself as an old man, but today almost unconsciously he derived a sense of satisfaction from the fact that he would have to pass several of those sentinels that keep tally of the passing years before he would reach his fortieth birthday.

"I can, after all, show my respect for the memory of my wife in no better way than by being considerate for and acting in a perfectly honorable way toward all her sex. It depends more upon that than it does upon my denying myself the pleasure of their society. If there was no true friendship between men and women, aside from that which should necessarily lead to love and marriage, this would be an uninteresting world and an empty one to many; for even the marriage tie does not always insure friendship, for many who bear the titles of husband

and wife could have done each other no more irreparable wrong than they have by marrying and rendering each other's lives miserable. I think the simple fact that the all-wise Creator has ordained that we should be born into the same family, and hold toward each other the most sacred ties of blood, is proof that He does not intend that we should hold ourselves aloof, which in itself is suggestive of evil, but should cultivate a noble spirit that would be a safeguard against wrong, and encourage an intercourse of friendly kindness and attention which could not fail to add to the enjoyments of this life."

Thus thought Colonel Wilkins, and since he was a man grown and in the full possession of his faculties, who had a better right to judge? And moreover, who would own the spirit that would be led to say him nay?

In his old thoughtful way he arranged the robes about his companion more closely, and almost imagined that he once more had his wife by his side: that wife that he had taken from her home with such a proud sense of possession over seventeen years ago; but she had only been allowed to remain with him a few short years—not much more than half as long as she had lain in her lonely grave. But our minds, which are so persistent at times in giving us an itemized account of our life and doings, will sometimes in turn present our past to us in such a way that one backward sweep of memory will cover the whole length of time, with every incident therein contained, and in such a way as to make it seem one short unbroken dream—a dream whose impressions, even when we attempt it, will scarcely bear being carried into our waking hours.

This was the picture this man's life presented to him (if anything so vague could be called a picture) as he and the woman by his side had for some time been busy with their own thoughts. Then he said, at last:

"Mrs. Grey, do you not wonder sometimes what the future has in store for you?"

"Sufficient unto the day are the evils thereof," she answered, with a gay smile.

"I own myself answered," he said in turn; "but seriously, have you never wished that you could lift the veil that divides the present from the future?"

"Well, seriously then, do you mean in this world or the world to come?"

"I mean in this world first, since our present dealings are with earthly environments, and our future depends so much upon our life here."

"Yes, but our future does not depend upon what this world holds in store for us, but rather upon the use that we make of both present and future. I am afraid that my faith would be sorely tried by the spirit of prophecy; for if I knew, and if the future had nothing to offer me but privation and sorrow, I might become too discouraged to meet them. And if it held out nothing but perfect happiness to lure me on, I might become so satisfied with old earth that I would forget to prepare myself for heaven. And besides, if we could acquire the power to penetrate the unfathomable, either of this world or the one to come, we would lose respect for God as an all-wise ruler and begin to doubt and criticise his methods."

"Well," was the man's answer, "if you have not been given the spirit of prophecy, as you say, you seem to have been given the knowledge of what is best for us."

"I would not have thought, Colonel Wilkins, that you, of all men, would waste time in flattery," she answered, in a tone of reproach. "I have the ordinary power of thought."

"Yes; all rational beings have been given the power to think, but while some are hiding their talents in the

earth, others are employing theirs to fathom some of God's great truths."

"Well, since we will have to give an account of how we use this talent for good, and I am only exercising it according to the strength God gave me, there is no occasion for praise."

"If I did not know you as well as I do, and your conduct toward others did not prove otherwise, I would be led to think that only the heroic and uncalled for deeds were commendable in your eyes or worthy of notice."

"I am far from depreciating the value of small things, for it is those which proclaim not only our patience and fortitude, but our kindness of heart and soundness of principle as well. But when I am praised I am led, through my own knowledge of myself, to know that I have been overestimated."

"But right here, Mrs. Grey, you deny to others the right that you take to yourself—that of judging in this matter."

"I know that it is wrong to exercise any right that you are not willing to grant to others, and I only take this as another proof of my weakness—a weakness that would have caused my sorrow to overwhelm me and to lose faith in God and man had I not put myself under supreme guidance."

"You refer to the death of your husband," he said gently, after a moment's silence. "I have had a similar experience and can understand you well, but, unlike you, I am afraid even now my faith has not entirely recovered from the shock."

"Death is certainly the hardest trial through which our faith is called to pass, but it should also be the greatest inspiration confined to earth to strengthen our faith; for when our loved ones are taken from us here, we cannot

fail to recognize in them an added star to the crown that is held out to us," was her thoughtful answer.

"Yes, but if we were assured that our loved ones would be to us what they were here, heaven would be more worth striving for."

"I am afraid that if we only try to make ourselves worthy of heaven in order to meet our earthly friends, we will fail in our attempt to get there at all. In our present imperfect state we can not conceive of our natures as becoming so exalted, that we would willingly loosen our grasp on earthly ties and affections; but 'known to God are all his works from the beginning,' and as in His great plan, He, through the degrees of evolution, reached perfection of His creation in man, so through the varied stages from the cradle to the grave He prepares us for the change that produces, not only the transformation of our bodies, but also the perfection of our spirits, and by the time our spirits are as fit for heaven as our forms were suitable for earth, our natures will have undergone such a change, that to know our friends are as happy as we are ourselves will be all-sufficient."

"Does not the fact that the present, with its environments (which we hold as of such vast importance), is as nothing compared to the hereafter, sometimes have a depressing influence upon you and make you feel as if our efforts here were as naught?"

"Our whole lives are as dross, but anything that is a part of God's plan should not be despised by us, and we should make them as round and full as possible by good works and deeds."

"Such reconciliation is wonderful in one whose sorrow is so new. Do you always feel so submissive to the Divine will?"

"Oh, no! oh, no! For a long time it was almost a

constant struggle that I might not rebel at the death of my husband; and even now I can not look at the long, lonely future without shrinking unless I first implore strength from above."

"Your future may be long, but it shall not be lonely; not if it is in the power of your friends to prevent it. Do not understand by this that I overestimate our powers, but simply that we will do all that we possibly can toward making you happy." He forgot, for the time, the youth that he had been so thankful for just a short time before, and looked at her with eyes that spoke of parental care and affection.

The tears of gratitude were in her eyes as she said, "I would indeed be ungrateful if I did not show my appreciation of your kindness by trying to be happy, and I have been as happy as it is possible for me to be."

"Forgive me if what I am about to say will seem unkind, but you are too young to talk in that way. I do not think that it will be in your nature ever to forget your dead, but your grief will soften by time, and much earthly happiness may still be before you. God knows how impossible it would be to carry so great an affliction in our hearts and still do our part toward the living; so He has made it a part of His divine ordinance that our sorrows shall mellow with age. If you promise to forgive me I will say still more. You will allow that it is a part of our duty to be as happy as possible in this life. This depends upon different surroundings, according to our dispositions; and if, as you say, in the eternal world, our natures will be so deepened and broadened as to be able to lay down all distinction, and our earthly affections will be as if they had not been, so that we shall know each other only as happy spirits, why, if the future looks lonely, should it always be so? Why should you not at

some future time again link your fortune with some worthy man? There are plenty who are not so sure of their route and would be glad for such a guide."

In her heart of hearts Mrs. Grey felt that this could never be, but it had been said in such a kindly, earnest tone that she could not feel hurt, and when she looked into the noble face of the man by her side, she could see that he had only been trying to propound a plan by which her happiness might be insured, and her heart went out to him in thankfulness.

"But," she said in answer, "you should not offer a suggestion by which you yourself would not be willing to profit, but I know that men are constituted differently from women. They seem to be all-sufficient for their own happiness, and do not depend so much upon companionship."

"Then things seem very different from what they really are," was his answer, "but I am older, and in all probability have not as many years before me as you have, and unlike you, I would be no help to any one, but rather the kind that would need to be led."

She looked at him earnestly as if she would satisfy herself as to the truth or untruth of the assertion. She knew that he would not make a depreciative remark about himself simply as a challenge to bring out any contrary opinion that she might hold of him. Could it be that this man of men, who had trained himself against the possibility of a dishonorable or unworthy thought or act, could think thus humbly of himself? But this was, after all, only a verification of the truth that the persons who would fill their minds with the profitable, must necessarily crowd out the thoughts that are vain and small.

"You are quite aged," she said at last, her seriousness

giving place to gayer tones. "I had not noticed it before; some five or six years older than myself I would judge."

"Have you never noticed my gray hair? If Jack Frost was not about to take advantage of the occasion, I would remove my cap to show you how busy old Father Time has been with the top of my head, trying to change its natural color to his favorite shade. I will not ask your age nor will I tell you mine. Those are secrets that we could not afford to divulge to any one, even if such a thing was not bad form, but I am at least ten years your senior."

They sat for some time quietly listening to the jingle of the bells. During their conversation they had paid little or no attention to either the farm houses or passers-by, but now their attention was drawn to a house which they were approaching, by the barking of a dog—one of those farm curs which seem to think that people might notice the snub if they did not entertain them from the time they have the slightest suspicion of their approach until long after they were gone out of sight, with one of their most vigorous displays of lung power; and the treble canine voice which greeted our friends gave evidence of much rehearsing and practice.

In the barn lot all alike looked white and clean under the newly fallen snow, which had clung to everything so persistently, from the lofty wind-pump down to the ill-favored pig-sty.

The inhabitants of this region all seemed to be housed in their respective quarters, as there were none in sight with the exception of an old bramah hen, which thought that she, through the length of her legs, would be justified in the attempt to make a tour of inspection; but even she seemed to be weighing heavily the advisability

of such a move, for she would raise one foot, suspend it above the snow in a thoughtful manner, and then bring it down only to raise the other with the same deliberation. From within the precincts of the poultry house came an excited rasping cackle, as a leghorn pullet was—not trying to practice deception upon her lord and master, oh, no; but only trying her voice and endeavoring to remind her professional sisters in the egg business that a little practice during the winter months would not come amiss.

As they hastened by, a long loud whinny sounded from the stable, as the noise of the bells caused one of its inmates to lose his equilibrium. It was not plain to his equine mind why he should be confined in a dull stable, while one of his kind should be traveling to such a lively tune. But they, no doubt, were scarcely out of hearing, until he forgot the slight implied and concluded that there was, after all, much comfort to be derived from a good warm stable with its accompaniments of oats, corn and hay.

As they neared a little brick school-house, the tap of the bell announced that the girls and boys, who came there daily with the hope that they might some time in the remote future even acquire the profound air and stately step of the instructor, had mastered enough education for one day, and that that superior personage had thought it time to send them home for rest and recreation. The door flew open. They all tried to get out at once, which bid fair to impede their progress, but soon several of the smaller boys slipped out between the legs of the larger ones. This sprung a leak, and soon the house bid fair to free itself of its heterogeneous mass, and wisdom most profound, with a way best known to its representatives of making itself felt, together with shrinking timid-

ity, come out in such a way as to give the latter just cause to fear that they would yet be undermined and buried in the snow.

The "little boys," as they are usually snubbed by those who have an eighth of an inch added to their stature, were soon engaged in the important industry of putting ears and some other finishing touches on a snow-man which they had not had time to finish during their short recess, but had hurriedly stuck a corn-cob pipe in the long crease which they intended for his mouth, to show that he was to be a man when he was finished, and now they were hurrying as only boys know how who are engaged in like occupations.

Some "bigger boys" were snow-balling with kindred spirits from among the girls; while still another size, and the most important of all and the envied of both the smaller sizes, were vigorously engaged in washing some blushing maidens' faces, who were making great pretensions at trying to escape—but all who themselves have been boys and girls at school know that this hubbub was only a challenge to further attention and more thorough face-washing.

Some were trying to impress their portraits upon this impromptu camera, by stretching themselves full length on the snow, while still others were engaged in the more invigorating pastime of wrestling.

In the background, around the door, stood the more demure little girls, looking their disapproval and waiting for an opportunity to escape in the more dignified position of walking with the teacher.

This brought back old memories in a way to make Mary Grey laugh merrily. "I could well imagine myself as one of the girls in that school-yard, were it not so hard

to imagine myself as only one, for I have been in all their places at different times."

"I never attended country school," said Colonel Wilkins, "but I always thought that those little rascals must have some prime fun, with plenty of time to study up deviltry and an opportunity to carry it out to the bitter end."

"Yes," was Mrs. Grey's laughing answer; "in country schools the sly have an opportunity to engage in a great deal of mischief; but there are also many drawbacks connected with the place for such, and you have well said 'to the bitter end,' for some of the masters fill in the time between recitations in trying to develop their muscular powers, and this exercise is usually taken by applying the ruler or some convenient hickory to the backs of those who become all the more incorrigible, and, as a consequence, much of this practice is necessary."

As they neared Cloverdale they met vehicles of every conceivable shape and style. Everything that could possibly be coaxed into locomotion had been placed upon runners and marshaled out. Light wagons, buggies, and even store-boxes, were trying to hold their own as sleighs. Some of the country lads who had sleighs—yes, theirs were real sleighs, even if they were not of the latest pattern and the paint was not quite so new as on some they met—were on their way to make as brave a showing as possible by driving up and down the village street with their sweethearts.

One bob-sled load, who seemed to be on their way to some merrymaking, were determined to keep the beaten track, and our friends were nearly upset into a drift on trying to round them. They seemed on pleasure bent, and since they had matters arranged in a way that could not fail to be congenial to the happiness of the most

sentimental youth, they were in no hurry. They were arranged in two rows, one on each side of the large wagon bed, and their self-satisfied looks gave the impression that every one had their choice by their side. Even the driver could not deny himself this bit of innocent pleasure: so he had arranged his seat as low as possible, and had an extra robe wrapped about his best girl, who was making a brave sitting by his side.

A boy who was clinging to the hind bob called to Colonel Wilkins as he passed: "Say, mister, if you are a parson, here's a fat job for you, for these spoonies are looking for some one to do the knot act for them, and you might as well have the cash as any one."

Boys with their hand-sleighs were now fast coming into prominence, but the Colonel's horse seemed to think that one sleigh at a time was quite enough for a well-bred horse, and sped along in such a way as to give the second one no possible show.

As they turned the corner of the street that led to Mrs. Grey's home, they met Mrs. Jones, with Miss Green, in her sleigh. They seemed so thoroughly absorbed in trying to determine satisfactorily who each driver had by his side that they hardly seemed to have time to enjoy their own ride.

"I thank you heartily for this pleasant drive," said Mrs. Grey to Colonel Wilkins, as he lifted her from the sleigh at her own gate.

"I am glad to know that the enjoyment has been mutual," was his reply, "and if you do not object I will come again for you some time."

"I certainly should not object," she said frankly, giving him her hand.

"And you have not been displeased with me?" he asked, earnestly.

“Not in the least, and shall always regard you as a very kind friend.”

Saying good night, the man was soon on his way home and alone with his thoughts.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE DREAM.

THAT night Mrs. Grey was soon sleeping the sleep that only exercise, a sound body and a clear conscience will insure, but this restful slumber gave place to that of uneasiness and strange dreams. She thought that she was lying safely in her bed when two paths opened up before her. The one was up a steep and dizzy path which led to the top of a hill, upon which was, glittering in the sunlight, a castle of magnificent splendor. The other was along an even beaten track, which led to a haven of sweet simplicity. Along the one a stranger was strewing hot-house flowers and sweet perfumes. Along the other a more familiar form was gathering a bouquet of sweet, old fashioned roses, honeysuckles and blue bells. While the steep but beautiful path was strange to her, the other reminded her of scenes connected with her childhood's home. Sometimes the face of the one who was trying to make the one path alluring, in spite of its danger, would take on a familiar form; then just as quick the recognition would vanish. The other, who was holding out to her peace and sweet security, was sometimes that of her mother, and then again the likeness of Colonel Wilkins was strangely intermingled.

Sometimes she would be following the path, which, after all, was only dangerous enough to be enticing at the outset; but after a time the heat and the odor of the strange tropical flowers became stifling, and there was no shade in which to rest, but the stranger would look back with a smile of assurance that would lead her on. And then again, as if drawn by those eyes of painful entreaty,

she would be following their owner with a sense of utter restfulness along the humble yet shady walks, and she would be transformed into a happy, care-free girl, and would be watching the brook which flowed through her father's farm, or gathering the self-same flowers, which had not only gone out from her life years ago, but had disappeared both root and branch long ere this.

Sometimes the scenes of her dreams were quickly shifted from one to the other, and then again she seemed divided and her feet would be drawn, even though somewhat reluctantly, in one direction, while her spirit would be hovering in peace and joy along the other.

At last she found herself upon the summit of the beautiful hill, and with feverish haste and excitement was drinking in its strange grandeur. Her handsome guide was just about to lead her into the castle—that was a strange construction of golden coin, rare jewels, the skins of animals, and strange flowers, and was built upon the extreme edge of the declivity—when the ground beneath her feet gave way. She made an attempt to regain her foothold, but the frail wall of the castle to which she tried to cling gave way, so did the vines and shrubs at which she grasped in her desperation; and just as she was beginning to go down, down, down, she awoke. How glad she was to be awake. She lay for some time in strange bewilderment, her heart beating almost to suffocation, and she felt almost as exhausted as if her dream had been a reality. When the dazed feeling had worn away, and she was assured that she had not been out of her bed, the clock struck one; but the clock struck several times more before she again fell asleep.

“If I was a believer in dreams, I would think that I had a presentiment, and that I am to reach a crisis in my life in the near future, and will be called upon to make

the choice between right and wrong in an important matter," she said to Mrs. Ferris the next morning.

"Don't you think," said her friend, "that we are making that choice constantly, every day and every hour, and that our very lives are a choice between right and wrong?"

"Yes," said Mrs. Grey, "the fact that some people live proclaims the choice. I am afraid that the fact that it is wrong and an unpardonable sin is all that keeps many a poor discouraged soul from ending his life by his own hand. But my dream would almost suggest that there was something unusual before me, in which I am to be sorely tried."

"It is only through severe trials that we can make sure of our strength, and the unusual ones are the severest tests, because they do not give us an opportunity to be on our guard. But as the beauty and brilliancy of the diamond is only brought out by the most persistent grinding, so our characters and natures can only be rounded and perfected by coming in contact with the sharp edges of this great burnishing tool, the world."

"Well," said Mary Grey, "the fact that the whole world is not rounded and perfected (since there is so little want of opportunity) is proof that we do not always profit by the grinding, but sometimes disclose a sharpened effect instead; and, knowing this, we can not look forward to coming into unnecessary contact with the world with any degree of assurance, and so would avoid it if possible." And her friend noticed for the first time that she was taking the matter almost seriously.

"Your dream must indeed have had a depressing effect upon you to make you talk in such a tone. It is not one of your characteristics to meet trouble half way, and if it were not for that healthy color on your face I would think

that your liver had become disordered and would prescribe accordingly. But even if there was anything in our sleeping visions, I would not let this weigh upon my mind. It would be nothing worse than we have both undergone in the past. Excuse me for referring to such an unpleasant subject; but since you have gone through one of the most trying ordeals in the last few months that human flesh is heir to and envy and malice can drag us through, and are none the worse, I have no fear for you."

"You mean those unjust implications. A nature that can not withstand slander, but becomes narrowed and embittered, proves itself as being in no great degree superior to those who originate or carry on the talk; and the persons who try to defend themselves against wrong by becoming angry and acting in the same spirit as their accusers, thereby destroy their only effectual weapon of defense—an unimpeachable character.

"And so, in the same degree, does a woman who has shown herself proof against injury from that most persistent of enemies, the human tongue, whose poison is so subtle as to eat its way unawares into the heart and brain of its victims, prove her nature to be such as to be able to deal with the many minor ills of life; and since there is nothing in dreams, we will think no more about this one, and I will give you something real instead. Here is a letter for you. Mr. Ferris brought it last night. I thought you would be sleepy after your drive in the cold, and so I did not disturb you."

Mrs. Grey wondered who her letter could be from. She could tell by the postmark that it was from the city, but who did she know there that would write to her? She was in the act of starting to her own room, when Mrs. Ferris said kindly: "You can read your letter here, as I

was just about to leave the room. Yes, I am going any way," she said, as she saw Mrs. Grey hesitate in doubt.

The first thing she did upon opening her letter was to look at the inscription—"Nellie Alton." Mrs. Alton had heretofore sent her messages to Mrs. Grey through her letters to her sister-in-law, and she wondered what the lady might have to say to her that would occasion a letter. But she was not long to remain in doubt. The little lady's letter was as dainty as herself, and her chirography as plain as care and precision could make it, and guiltless of any hidden or secret meaning.

"I am so glad," Mrs. Grey said to Mrs. Ferris, after that lady had read her letter. "I have lived so far removed from the want and suffering of the world that I have become indifferent and selfish; and that is the kind of work that I have always wished to do, only I would rather be able to help them from my own purse than to be only the instrument in the hands of others."

"I would rather you did not go at all, but that you would be content to stay here instead; but since you seem to think that your happiness depends upon it, I wish you God-speed. It is only for three months, I believe, and then you will come back to us, of course."

"Yes, I will come back when the time is up; but I will have to give up my pupils," she said, anxiously, "and what will there be for me to do when I get back?"

"You will be able to see them all before you go. If you tell them your mission in the city, they will get some one to fill your place temporarily, and will gladly take you back at the end of the three months."

"I will get to see the other two, but not Colonel Wilkins. The letter says that they would like to have me there to assume my duties by the first of February. This

letter has been delayed nearly a week," she said, looking at the date. "I will be sure to be satisfied with any financial arrangement that they may make, and so will go on Saturday. I will then have only the Sabbath on which to become somewhat accustomed to my new surroundings, since next Monday is the first of February. Do not think that I am glad to leave my friends, because I certainly have occasion to be otherwise; but I think those who have none of their own who need them are the ones who should be willing to administer to the comfort of strangers who do need them."

Thus it was settled. She penned Mrs. Alton a few lines to tell her that she would be there on Saturday to do anything that they might require of her.

The next three days she was very busy. Her mind was filled with excitement and a sense of pleasure. There were those who needed her—such as she could really benefit. There was some real, active work before her—something to occupy both time and thought.

She went to see her pupils. They were sorry to give her up, and promised that the place should be open to her whenever she should see fit to fill it again. She went to the bank, where her little hoard was deposited. She wished to ascertain the amount, so she would know how much to depend upon in case she needed it. This had accumulated to a snug little sum, almost more than she had expected.

After she had everything else attended to, she packed her trunks, and by the time Saturday morning had arrived she was ready to start for the scenes of her labors.

"Remember," said Mrs. Ferris, "that you are always to regard this as your home, and that you will be welcome here under any and all circumstances."

"Such a face as hers should be proof against harm and

injury any place and at any time," thought that lady, as she saw Mrs. Grey depart, and stood watching the train pull slowly out of the station.

Thus Mrs. Grey had left the home of her friend, to return to it—when? Who knows?

CHAPTER XXV.

THE DISAPPOINTMENT.

I WONDER" said Johnny Wilkins to his brother in a rueful tone, "if father will think that horse tame enough for us to drive this winter. I am sure he is no worse than he always was, and he never hesitated to risk him with us before."

"Well," said Will, "that was different; because then we could go together, but the sleigh is too small for three. You would not like to go alone and I am sure I don't care to."

This reasoning did not seem to make Johnny's disappointment any easier to bear, as he stood at the window watching his father depart for Cloverdale on the following Tuesday morning, and he only wished that the years would hurry by that would make him a man.

Meanwhile his father was hastening toward his destination in a state of pleased expectancy. The snow, by this time, had settled and the sleighing was perfect. But the smoothness of the road and the noise of the bells were little in accord with his thoughts, and he paid little heed to them.

He found himself wondering what would the life be like that was stretched out before his little friend. He felt that he had a fatherly interest in her, and considered her happiness above all things else; but when he came to think of what might be necessary to secure her happiness, his own life not only crept slyly into the arrangement, but also held a prominent part there. But he would not have owned this, even to himself.

He could not conceal the look of pained disappointment

that came over his frank and open countenance when Mrs. Ferris told him that the little music teacher had gone to the city to be gone until spring. "When did she begin to think of such an act?" was his first question, and it was plain to be seen that he thought he should have been apprised of such an important move, if not consulted in the matter.

"She did not get my sister-in-law's letter until last Wednesday morning. She told me to tell your family how sorry she was to leave us all, but you know this is the kind of work that she has always wanted to do, and has only been waiting for an opportunity."

He maintained a polite silence as Mrs. Ferris told him that Mrs. Grey had gone to distribute, among the poor, funds that had been raised by a company of rich people, of which her brother was treasurer. But the look of disappointment on his face had given place to one of greatest concern before she got through.

"I wish she would have thought more of herself," he could not refrain from saying, "instead of so much about the poor. Not but what this is a most laudable and worthy object, but imagine a woman like her in a large city with nothing but strangers."

"Innocence is its own best protection, and I don't know of a woman who is more capable of taking care of herself, under any circumstances, than Mary Grey; and besides she will not be entirely among strangers. My brother and his wife are there and will show her every kindness."

This did not have the effect to soften the look upon the man's face; but he only said, "Of course Mrs. Grey is her own mistress, but I don't see why some women will persist in doing for others when most men would find it more than they cared to do to take care of themselves."

"You forget, Colonel Wilkins," said the lady, "that there is a salary connected with this arrangement, and that in taking care of others Mrs. Grey will also be taking care of herself."

The man looked at her with a half angry, questioning look. "I did not know that Mrs. Grey was not earning sufficient for her needs, or that she was only here on sufferance."

"Hoity toity!" was her reply. "There is hardly any occasion for such manifestation of spirit. You act as if you thought that I had sent her away as a personal grievance to you; but I assure you that I had nothing to do with her going. She did not even ask my advice, much less consent, and I have always treated her in a way that even you could not disapprove of. Pray let us not fall out about a mutual friend, for I assure you I have her interest and happiness at heart as much as you possibly could have."

"I had no intention of falling out with an old friend," he said, as he smilingly offered her his hand. But he went away in anything but a satisfied mood. Of course he did not dare to tell Mrs. Ferris the chief cause of his irritation. But he thought, as he drove slowly homeward, "I would much rather she had gone among strangers than the ones she has gone to. Her personal security would be just as much assured."

He stopped at the post-office. He never received any mail on Tuesday, but deep down in his heart a sly hope had gained a foothold. "She may have written to me. She always seemed to think much of the boys and may have wanted to make some explanation." But there was nothing there. He was disappointed, but his head refused to own what his heart declared. "Of course she would not need to write, when she left word with Mrs.

Ferris." And what right had he to expect such notice from her? He had a fatherly interest in her, of course, but what daughter of that age found it expedient to consult her father? and so he should be content with a father's dues.

He did not try to conceal his regret when he told the people at home that they did not need to expect to see Mrs. Grey again before spring.

"The rest of the winter will be pretty lonesome for us, wont it boys?" he said to Johnny and Will, who seemed to agree with him heartily.

Johnny was very demonstrative in his remarks against missions and good works in general, if they necessitated his parting with his friend, companion and teacher. His father did not correct him, as was his custom when he indulged in unfeeling talk. This coincided too closely with his own views of the matter.

"How consistent are the works of Providence," said Deacon Hill, in a profound tone to his wife Betsy, when a few weeks after Mrs. Grey's departure, he had heard glowing accounts of her good works done in the city, but his tone changed, as it had a trick of doing, when he said, "It is as plain as the nose on my face (which should be plain, considering the size of that member) that this world was not made for a joke. But it does seem almost like a pity," he went on thoughtfully, "that it was necessary to remove the good Parson Grey that the city might secure an angel of mercy. And to think," he went on, a visible rise in his spirits, "how she was treated here by some as were not worthy to unloose her shoe latchet. If I was allowed to suggest an addition to this town, it would be a public whipping post, and an expert at the business to deal out the full number of stripes to those who fail to hold back on the bridle on their tongues; but

I guess some of them do, and the bridle breaks," he said, spitefully.

"Deacon," said his good wife, "wouldn't you be ashamed to suggest such punishment for the women, since they are the only ones that would need it?" she concluded, slyly.

"Betsy," he began, dryly, "no insinuations." But his tone soon changed to one of earnestness as only such deacons as he are capable of managing. "The women do a vast amount of talking it is a fact; but how would they know half of the mischief going, if their husbands and brothers did not tell them? Their gossips and little spites about their pretty frocks and pretty faces, house keeping and cooking, only acts as a spring tonic to make them all want to tidy up and look the nicest. The men start most of the harmful talk, even if the women do help a little to carry it on, and they are the ones who will have to give an account in the next world, if they do shift the blame here. If we instituted a whipping post, I would want the management of it for awhile. I think I would be able, through the muscle of my right arm, to give some fellows their dues. Betsy," he said in all solemnity, "although you have no suspicion of it, even your good deacon has done some talking that he had no business to do, and he would rather give an account for the deeds done in the body while he is here."

"That would make it necessary for some one else to handle the whip awhile," said Betsy, a moisture gathering in her eyes at his seriousness, as she laid her hand timidly over his larger one. She could not find it in her nature to think the less of him. He had always been a good deacon to her, and her admiration only increased at his confession.

"You women are queer creatures," he said to her a

little sheepishly; "there is no understanding you nohow." But he nevertheless laid his other hand over hers. "A person would think the more faults a man had the better you liked him. It almost looks that way sometimes."

"The spirit is sometimes willing, but the flesh is weak," she said in a comforting, reassuring tone. But she had no chance to say more, for just then callers were announced. After the deacon saw who they were he had barely time to give his wife a wink before Mrs. Dixon, Mrs. Jones and Miss Green came into the room.

Betsy had no sort of a notion what that wink meant, but she knew that it was something weighty. So she was silent and awaited developments.

The Hills had never been on very friendly terms with their visitors, but the ladies had, on several previous occasions, taken advantage of being on "calling terms," so this visit caused no surprise.

The deacon gave his wife another wink to let her know that the supreme moment had come, and then began:

"How happyfying it ought to be to us all to hear such good reports from Sister Grey; such good news from one whom we are so interested in, has certainly made us all glad." This was accompanied by such a look as he thought most becoming to one of his standing, talking to the subordinates of the church.

"Yes," said Mrs. Jones, weakly, after she had given the speaker ample time to disclose what the news was. But doing anything of that kind was contrary to his intentions.

"But," he went on, instead, "Betsy and me have taken more comfort from this than any news that we have had for a long time, and I suppose we all have." This was accompanied by an innocent, questioning look directed straight at Mrs. Jones.

"Yes, of course," was her answer, still weakly. "We are always glad to hear good news from any one, and since the Widow Grey has gone—where?" and she tried to look as if her memory had served her a sudden trick by leaving her.

"Yes, she is there," was his answer; "she had no trouble at all in reaching there. She made the best kind of connections."

"And what occupation did she say that she was engaged in? My recollections are not as good as they were once. You know, Deacon, that people of our age can not rely too much on their memories."

"Oh, yes," he said, "she engaged at once in her occupation, and of course is occupying her time in the same way still; and how happy it makes us all to know that she is happy."

All further attempts to elicit the facts from the Deacon proved just as futile, and the supreme questions, Where has Mrs. Grey gone? and what is she doing? were not answered.

"Well, Deacon," said his wife, when they were once more alone, "you are as hard to catch as a colt in a woods pasture when it thinks you are in fun and want to have a race."

"And you would not have opened your mouth, even to hollow 'Oh!' if I had jagged you with a pin, or exploded a cartridge behind your back, after I gave you that wink; so we ought to be willing to call it even."

But those upon whom those tricks had been practiced were not so charitable in their conclusions and not so kindly disposed toward the old couple.

"The Deacon Hill could have proven to us that he was getting daft without trying half so hard," was Mrs. Jones' complimentary address.

"Getting daft!" said Mrs. Dixon, in flippancy; "if there is ever any change in him he will get some sense, because he never has been burdened with an oversupply. A person would be led to think that he had a monopoly on the news about Mrs. Grey, and would lose his control if he happened to let a little of it leak out."

"He reminded me more," said Mrs. Jones, "of a girl at school who has a secret that is very hard on her, but is too much ingrossed in its importance to tell it."

Since to keep a watch over ourselves is the most important of the neighborhood affairs, and we had upon previous occasions acted as eavesdroppers, we did not further intrude ourselves upon these ladies' society. But still, since Miss Green could not be trusted and seemed on mischief bent, it was best to keep her under surveillance. She went directly to the post-office, and when she came out she had a more satisfied look upon her face. She said to herself: "Deacon Hill can't keep everything locked up in his manly bosom; not since there is a post-office in the place, with some one whose duty it is to answer such questions. So she has gone to the city. I wonder what for. But I will find out; and I will find out whether Colonel Wilkins writes to her."

She had entertained some secret hopes concerning the Colonel for a number of years, and when she saw them driving together her jealousy had been aroused. It was some satisfaction to know that she was gone; but still, might he not be writing to her? He went in and out of the post-office too often lately. If she could only contrive to prove something against her character, something that would be believed against her and would degrade her.

CHAPTER XXVI.

MRS. GREY'S DUTIES IN THE CITY.

SPRING was again here, and with it had come relief to the multitudes, not only to the poor, by bringing employment to the willing, and shedding her warm, benign smiles over the face of all nature in such a way that fuel and warm clothing could be dispensed with, but also to the philanthropist who had been doing such noble work to lessen the want and suffering. It was only the middle of April, but winter seemed either to have spent its force or to have relented early and gone back to his arctic lair.

The three months that Mrs. Grey was to spend in the city were nearly over. She was glad. Not that she had wearied of her labors, but that much of its cause had been removed, and that she was so soon to see her friends. It would be so nice to be at home again. And then, as soon as the weather had settled, she wanted to go and plant some flowers on Robert's grave. She had promised herself that she would on the day of the funeral, and that resolve, together with the grave, was just as fresh in her mind as on the day that they were made. She would get a slip from his own rose bush at Cloverdale. Since she was not near enough to give the tender varieties the necessary attention, she would plant only perennial ones, and those hardy plants would also be more emblematic of his life and character.

Although she looked forward with pleasant anticipation to the relief and change that the end of her appointment would bring to her, she also experienced a sense of sadness. Most of the people upon whom she had been

called to attend would now be self-sustaining, but with many of the ill-disciplined ones it would still require a brave struggle; and those were, after all, the ones who called for the deepest solicitude. She would fain stay among them, were it advisable.

She had not gone among them simply as an employed helper, but as a sincere friend—one who could not only enter into their faintest joys, but deepest sorrows as well, and as such had become truly attached to not a few of them.

She had come in contact with the two great classes, the worthy and the shiftless poor. But to her they presented such a variation that they could be divided and subdivided and still a difference would be discernable. Among the unworthy—that great class which say to the public, as if in so many words, “You owe us a living, and if you do not give it to us willingly, we will get it in a way that will cost you much more than simply the price of the food and clothing”—there are those who seem utterly satisfied with their low estate, if they only have such clothing as not only common decency but also the mandates of the law require, and sufficient food to satisfy the craving of their by no means sluggish appetites. And the means by which they are obtained causes them no compunction of conscience; and they eat when hungry, lie down when sleep overcomes them, and go in and out much like the lower animals, from which their habits but slightly remove them.

And then there is the by no means less common class, whose habits and inclinations are not superior to the former, but who try to impress their grief at their condition and their willingness and ability upon their hearers by continually railing at providence or their neighbors, who are, by their own exertions, better fed and clad than them.

Then, among the unfortunates who have a better claim upon our sympathy, there are those who seem to have been destined by fate to lead an humble life; who are not only born poor, but with a total lack of ingenuity, which is expressed by them as being born for bad luck. And this is, after all, not such a misnomer, for where skill is wanting, luck is sure to take wings, and every attempt on their part is either too soon, too late, or not well enough done to bring its wonted profit.

Then there is that innumerable company of those who were born and reared in homes of plenty or even luxury, who have, either by an adverse fortune, their own mismanagement or the avarice of their contemporaries, been brought to privation and want. This has the effect to embitter the hearts and lives of many, a fact which is plainly evident in every lineament of their countenance, while others bear their now helplessly unalterable condition with a patience and fortitude which is almost pathetic.

Mrs. Grey had won the love and confidence of all. They did not fear and mistrust her as they had others who had come among them. They could see that she did not come simply to pry into their misery, nor did she go among them with an air that said, "I have come to help you, to be sure, but if you had been as wise and industrious as I, you would be able to take care of yourselves, and might have spared us all this trouble."

Several of the wealthy people would have been willing, after they had seen Mrs. Grey, to take her into their own homes. But she declined their overtures, and persisted in taking apartments and board with a lady-like little widow who was courageously trying to support herself and a family of small children. Owing to this woman's manner, the people had never had the courage to offer her

any assistance, but Mrs. Grey had been instructed to keep a close watch that she did not come to want, and that little missionary soon wisely concluded that the best way to help a nature like hers was to give her a better opportunity to help herself, and pay her well for her services; and she was so skillful in her management of this little affair, that the willing woman never for a moment suspected how near she came to being an object of charity. And this method was carried out in all her dealings with the self-respecting class. Some she would employ to make such common and substantial garments as were within their skill, to be distributed in charity, while those for whom the articles of clothing were intended were given some other way in which to earn them. Thus each was led to believe that they were assisting in the work of charity; and Mrs. Grey was often deeply affected by some of the most needy ones protesting against taking any pay for their services.

By thus doing she not only spared their pride and dignity, but the means with which she was intrusted were extended into a wider field and greater usefulness.

Mrs. Grey had seen very little of Mrs. Alton since she had come to the city. The winter had kept that lady closely housed, and Mrs. Grey's mind and time had been too thoroughly taken up with her duties to think of pleasure during the week, and even on Sunday she freely gave her time between church hours; and when she was not away from home, beguiling some fretful patient or amusing a troublesome child in order to give its mother a half holiday, she was in her own room with the widow's trio about her, trying to exert over them her power to entertain, while their mother was induced to attend the afternoon services or was away chatting for a short time with a friend. In the occupation of nurse the lady succeeded

admirably, and she never was so happy as when she had one child on her lap and one on either side leaning against her shoulder.

Of Mr. Alton she had seen much, since he was manager of the fund she was expending. His calls had not been infrequent. She had always been glad to see him. She regarded him more as a big brother than as a friend. He seemed so genial and whole-souled that the world had always seemed brighter for his having been there. But now the time of her stay was fast drawing to a close. She was soon to leave off her busy life in the city for the rest and quiet of Cloverdale.

"I will soon see, not only kind Mrs. Ferris and her husband and daughter, but the Hills, and Johnny and Will Wilkins, their father and Aunt Minnie."

She wondered if they had missed her, and if they had been disappointed when they came for her and found her gone. Then it occurred to her, as if by revelation, that she had not acted a friend's part toward them. "I certainly should have proven my appreciation of their many kind attentions to me, by writing them a letter of explanation instead of leaving word with Mrs. Ferris. I wonder what they thought of me?" Then in her reproach of self, she feared that it might lessen their regard for her, and she did so want to retain the good opinion of those who had proven themselves as such desirable friends.

Then involuntarily her thoughts were led to the last visit she had paid to the country, when Colonel Wilkins had come for her and took her back to Cloverdale himself. She thought of his manner toward her. "No wonder his sons were so gentlemanly. They could hardly be otherwise with such a father."

She had never given the subjects of that day's conversation any thought, but now she recalled the one dis-

tinctly. He had said, "If all our earthly ties will be dissolved, and in heaven will be as if they had never existed, why should those whom death robs of their first choice lead lonely lives here? Why should they not make themselves happy by trying to administer and add to the happiness of another?"

She could see no reason why those who could love anew, should not. Surely it would be a pity for a man like Colonel Wilkins, who seemed so well qualified to make a woman happy, to lead a single life while so many unworthy ones were marrying every day.

"But with me it is different. Marriage is one of heaven's ordinances, and to assume that sacred relationship lightly can not fail to be, not only a sin before God, but the greatest wrong and injustice that two of His creatures are capable of doing each other; and an unhappy married life to such can only be a just retribution for such an offense. While it might be right for some, owing to their natures, to marry twice or even oftener, I am destined to but one companion, and if I live to the proverbial age of three score years and ten, I will be as true to Robert in both my heart and life as if he were by my side to appreciate it. Oh, no, those three years of my life were too happy for me ever to think of allowing another to take my dead husband's place."

She did not know that the woman whose first marriage proves happy is sometimes the first to think of a second.

CHAPTER XXVII.

MARY GREY SEEKS EMPLOYMENT.

IT only lacked a few days now of the time that Mrs. Grey had set for her return to her home. She had already made farewell visits to many of her new found but hearty friends, and was one evening looking through her trunk preparatory to packing it anew, when there was a rap at her door, and, upon opening it, she was not a little surprised to admit Mr. Alton.

"You seem to be glad to get away from us," was his first salutation, as he stood (without noticing the chair that she offered him) regarding her open trunk. "There is hardly any need of packing your trunk so soon. Have I not always been a friend to you?"

"Why, certainly," she said, surprised at such an unusual question. "I could not ask more of a brother and sister than you and your wife have been to me. But since my labors here are over, I must go back to my home and my work. Indeed my friends have been kind to wait on me even this long."

"Back to your music and Colonel Wilkins," he thought savagely, "but you will not go if I can prevent it." Then he said, "But if I can convince you that it is your duty to remain here, then what? Would you stay if I prove such to be the case?"

"I suppose so, if it were really necessary," she said, a little regretfully. "But you are only joking."

"No, I am not joking, as you will find. Mrs. Alton is growing weaker every day, and is in need of a nurse, and I came to ask you to accept the position."

"Why have you not told me this before? I would

have come to see her oftener, at the sacrifice of other duties if necessary. Of course I will nurse her if she needs me; but then I can not go home," she said, suddenly recollecting herself.

"You need not go home," was his answer, "and besides, you will find as good a home in my house as with my sister. Only say that you will come, and you can rest assured that you shall never want for a home."

"Oh, no, I have no fear. Your sister assured me a home with her always, and I do not fear that she will change her mind or turn me out because I stay to nurse your wife."

"Then you will come," he said; "and since my wife is very much in need of some one, I hope you will put on your hat and shawl and go with me at once."

"I hardly thought that you meant tonight, but still if it is necessary I can go."

So after telling her landlady her mission, she set her room to rights and went with him at once. She tried to hide her surprise as she approached her friend's bedside, but she did not know how illy she succeeded. She had not expected to find her so reduced.

"My husband has gone to find a nurse," said the sick woman. "Do you know if he has returned?"

"I have come to nurse you," was Mary Grey's reply. "Your husband walked to the door with me, and then stopped to talk to Dr. Shelly. But did you not send for me?"

"Yes, my husband wanted a nurse for me, and I am glad you came," was her answer. But she nevertheless gazed after the figure, whose every outline bespoke of health, with a pathetic look in her eyes that her husband, however, would not understand, even though she faintly hoped, at first, that it might remind him of a conversa-

tion that they had had only a short time before, when she had told him that the contrast between herself and Mrs. Grey was painful to her, and that she would willingly dispense with all other society but his.

Fred. Alton understood the language of her eyes, even though he made no sign at the time. His conscience smote him. So on the next morning he said to Mrs. Grey that "she might amuse herself in the parlor, in the library, and read or in any way that was most congenial to her. I will nurse my wife myself, and only wanted some one in the house in case that she should grow suddenly worse."

So the man watched by the bedside alone. But the vigil was not a lengthy one. Her ailment took a decided turn for the worse, as is so commonly the case with invalids in the spring of the year, when the leaves begin to come out, owing to the condition of the atmosphere; and a week after Mrs. Grey entered the house as nurse her patient had gone to her long home.

The city relatives and a few intimate friends had been going in and out, but aside from that no one even knew that she was worse. When she passed away her husband was with her alone to the last, and no one else knew of it until she was gone. So, after all, her heart had been satisfied to the end.

After she was dead the news spread, and when friends and relatives began to come in, Mrs. Grey knew that her presence could be dispensed with. So she told Mrs. Ferris that she would make her final arrangements and return with her to Cloverdale after the funeral. She still had some good-bye calls to make among her people.

It was the evening before the funeral. She was hurrying from one place to the other, thinking, "I hope that I will get around in time to pack my trunk." She was just

about to turn down the street that led to her rooms when who should come facing her but Miss Green.

This young lady had some distant relatives in the city, and had been there for several days. She had contrived to find out that Mrs. Grey was expected back to Cloverdale the first week in May, so she had come to the city to see if anything could be done, by fair means or foul, to prevent it. She had not had the courage to go up to the Alton residence, and she wanted a chance to talk with her; so here was her opportunity.

"How nice it is to meet old friends in a strange place, Sister Grey," she said, extending her hand.

Mrs. Grey returned her cordial greeting and then said: "I am somewhat in a hurry as I wish to pack my trunk this evening, but if you will come to my rooms, we can have time for a talk. It will not take you out of your way much, as we are nearly there now."

Miss Green tried to conceal the alacrity with which she accepted the invitation, but since her companion was not regarding her in the light of a suspect, she might have spared herself the pains.

"So you are getting ready to go back to Cloverdale? I suppose if Colonel Wilkins had known that you would only have nursing to do for such a short time, he would have waited for you to come back instead of getting another teacher for his boys." The speaker noticed a slight start on the part of Mrs. Grey, but she made no reply, but went on laying out her wardrobe preparatory to packing.

"That is the best damper that I could have put on her enthusiasm about going back. Now if I could only make her think that he had hired some one else to fill her place because he had heard something against her character, I would not have to work on her feelings much more to

get her to hunt pupils here or do almost anything else rather than go back to Cloverdale. It never seemed to make much odds to her what the rest of us thought about her, as long as she had the Ferrises, the Hills and Colonel Wilkins, but if she once thinks that she has fallen in grace in their sight, she will not consider it worth while to come back to Cloverdale. Even if it is a trumped up story, all is fair in—war, they say, only I must be careful and not implicate myself."

"You must be a better Christian than I am," she said sweetly, "to give up a position that was paying you fairly well, to come here to work among the trashy poor for nothing. But you always did have queer notions about your duty, and did things that no one else would risk themselves to do. I don't see how you could afford to live in the city, pay all your own expenses and work for nothing."

"What makes you think that I did it for nothing, Miss Green?"

"None of us thought that you were doing the work for nothing. We Cloverdale people were under the impression that you were being well paid, but since I came to the city I have discovered that we were misinformed."

"Who are your friends here?" was Mary Grey's next question. "Whom do you know?"

"Oh, no one that you know or have met, but the lady that I am visiting belongs to the same church as some of the people who raised this poor fund, and meets them at their aid society. She said that she heard them say that Mr. Alton had secured such an excellent lady to distribute the money among the needy, a Christian lady of leisure who would be only too glad to spend her time in good works."

Mrs. Grey made no answer, so she went on: "The

lady wrote to me about the matter some time ago, but I thought there might be some mistake; but since I came to the city, my friend asked them if you were not being paid a salary. They looked surprised, and said 'certainly not;' that 'you had not asked for it.'"

Mrs. Grey went on packing her trunk, and kept her back to her visitor. She was certain that there was a mistake, but she did not want the woman to see the effect of her words, idle though they were.

"I spoke to Colonel Wilkins about it when I got my friend's letter. He said that he had not been troubling himself about the matter, but I could see that he was under the same impression as myself: namely, that the men were paying your expenses and giving you a salary without their wives knowing it. And it is my opinion that this had something to do with his hiring a new music teacher when your time was so near up."

"Why do you persist in tormenting me so?" said Mary Grey, turning her now thoroughly white face full upon her visitor. "Colonel Wilkins or any one else has a right to employ whom and when he pleases. Why do you tell me such things, Miss Green? What have I ever done to occasion your ill will?"

But that young lady remembered suddenly that she must not stay another minute or her friends would be worried about her.

"Well, I have made her realize for once that she is on the same planet with the rest of us, and will have to suffer alike the consequences. If she ever comes back to Cloverdale, I am no judge of human nature. But perhaps I had better give her another little thrust, because if she comes back now I will be found out." And Sarah Green realized that an uneasy conscience was ceaseless in its clamor for satisfaction.

"I will never speak to that woman again," thought Mary Grey. "It is no use to try to be friends with her. I have tried to soften her dislike, but she succeeds in making me miserable every time that I talk to her. She is certainly the worst cross that I have been called upon to bear."

She was about to resume her task, when the weight of the woman's talk dawned upon her. "What am I packing my trunk for? I could never live among those people under a shadow. Mr. Alton will clear up this mistake, I know, but I could never go back and know that they had ever doubted me for a moment; and if some of them have hired a new teacher, what would I do after I got there? But if I do not go to Mrs. Ferris', where else will I go? I wonder how much of this she knows." She sank into a chair in dumb despair. Her heart appeared four times its natural size and seemed to be bearing her to the floor with its weight. She seemed to be deprived of the power of thought.

The sound of voices in the corridor aroused her, and presently her landlady came to the door with Mr. Alton. He had been in the woman's sitting-room, waiting for Miss Green to leave. He had seen her on the street and recognized her, but had failed in reaching Mrs. Grey's side first. The landlady, thinking that he wanted to consult Mrs. Grey about some arrangement for the funeral, left him at the door. This he at once closed, bracing his back against it as if trying to keep some one out.

"Am I needed at the house?" was Mrs. Grey's first question. "I am sorry that it was necessary for me to leave. I did want to go back with Mrs. Ferris, but I will do whatever you ask me."

Then for the first time she noticed his attitude and the angry light in his eyes, but before she had time to express her surprise, he bursted out :

"What do you mean by 'did want to go'? What has that woman been telling you? I wish I had the power to throttle every single woman above thirty, for none of them have business of their own to keep them busy, and some married women deserve the same fate! Has she been telling you something that would hinder you going back to Cloverdale?"

"She has told me nothing but what you can clear up and make plain. But I am sorry, for the story seems already to have gained credence with some of my friends."

"Any one who could ever be led to believe wrong of you was never worthy of the name of friend. But what has she been telling you? I am waiting to hear the story."

"She said the impression among the ladies was that I was a person of leisure, and that they said positively that there was no salary raised for me, and that I was even supposed to be paying my own expenses; and that the general impression at Cloverdale was that the men were supporting me, without their wives' knowledge or consent." He had looked at her so straight that the words seemed to have been drawn from her verbatim.

"I had hoped to tell you of this little matter first; but since some one else has deprived me of the privilege, I hardly know how to explain so that you will understand and not be prejudiced."

"I never found it hard to understand matters of business, and always tried to keep myself as free as possible from prejudice. I promise you an impartial hearing. Go on, please; I am waiting to hear the story." She had used his own words, and was standing straighter than he had ever seen her.

"There is not much to tell. I paid what money you received out of my own purse; but my wife knew of it, else how could she have written to you as she did?"

"Did your wife know that you gave me the money, or did she think that it came from the general fund? Did you represent me as a lady of leisure, so that those ladies think that I would not even accept a salary? Does your sister know?"

"My wife would not have understood or cared if I had explained the matter to her, and it concerned no one else. Believe me, I only wanted to keep you in sight until I should be free; and since that time has come, you need never go back to Cloverdale. Stay in the city until a suitable time has gone by, and I will place you where want and care can never reach you, and even during the intervening time your every wish shall be my law. You shall fare as well as if you were my wife in very truth."

"And you are the man whom I have been regarding as a brother!—a man who would deliberately practice deception upon an unsuspecting woman, and in the name of charity and mercy, and then add to the injury by insulting her with overtures of marriage while the form of his angel wife is still lying in his home! Has the memory of her spotless life no power to shame you?"

He began as if to make excuses, but she put her hand on the knob of the rear door, saying: "If you have any more to add, I will excuse myself from remaining to listen."

After Mrs. Grey had heard the man leave the room, she returned and stood before her open trunk. She could not go back to Cloverdale now. She could never again enter the home of Mrs. Ferris. She could not remain in the city. Where should she go? Then for the first time her dream recurred to her. "Well," she thought, "if this is one of the ways that my sleeping fancy opened up to me, there will also be a safer although a humbler path."

This thought recalled a conversation that she had

overheard only a few days before. In trying to secure employment for a young girl, she had gone into an intelligence office. Here she found a lady who was in search of a waiting-maid to accompany her on a trip to Europe. She had engaged one, but the girl had changed her mind at the very last, and now the lady was ready to go and had no one to go with her. Mrs. Grey remembered her name and address. She would go and offer her services, and if she was not too late she would soon be far away from friends and foes alike. It was not quite nine o'clock. In a half hour she could be back.

She was soon once more on the street. She hailed a car, and in a short time was at her destination. The lady was not a little surprised at so late a call and on such an errand; but the face was one that would inspire confidence. So she asked her name, age, and former occupation, and if she had ever had any experience in the duties of a waiting-maid.

"I know nothing about such duties," was her answer, "but I am willing to learn, and, believe me, I have need to do it. I have heretofore made my living by giving music lessons, but would rather go with you in that capacity than to try to get pupils in a strange place."

The lady eyed her critically. It was a little strange that a woman of her address should be in search of such a situation. She must have been driven to self-support by misfortune. She did not look like a person who would take a sudden wild notion or be led by a spirit of adventure. "I would much rather have a homely, uneducated person than one with her lady face and ways," she thought, "but I think I will be able to teach her her place if she does not happen to know it."

"I go the day after tomorrow. Can you be ready by then?"

"There is only one thing that I would like to do before I go so far away, and that is to go to C—— and plant some flowers upon my husband's grave; but I am afraid that will be impossible in so short a time."

"Not necessarily impossible, since it is on our way. You can go on tomorrow and meet me on the next."

Since the lady was very much in need of a servant and Mrs. Grey was equally desirous of securing the position, they soon came to an agreement.

Mrs. Grey returned to her room very much relieved. She would soon be far away from the people who had doubted her; but she realized a dull pain at her heart when she remembered that she would also be far away from all that had ever been dear to her. But the story that she had heard tonight would soon be known to all her friends, and they could not fail to doubt her integrity, and she could bear anything rather than that; so she finished packing her trunk, bade her landlady good bye, and left the city by the early train.

The time for the funeral had nearly arrived. Two of the people had repeatedly inquired if Mrs. Grey had come. They were Fred. Alton and his sister. Mrs. Ferris wanted to see her before the funeral, to see if she would be ready to leave for home immediately after. The other wondered, hoped, yet feared, for reasons that he did not care to divulge.

They dispatched a servant to her rooms to see what could possibly be detaining her. Imagine their surprise when she returned saying that Mrs. Grey's landlady had told her that the lady had gone to Europe and had started on the early train. She did not know who with; only that she had gone; that was all.

Mrs. Ferris was amazed. "What could have happened to cause her to do anything so rash? And without even

telling us! She certainly made up her mind very suddenly, or imagined that she had just cause for concealing her actions."

She simply told the others who were expecting her that Mrs. Grey would not be there, but made no further explanation.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

AN HOUR WITH THE DEAD.

THE church yard speaks to us in a thousand tones, through the voices of our dead—voices which, through their very stillness, are carried, regardless of condition or space, to the various ends of the earth. For unlike living voices which reach us through the slumberous sense of hearing, their meaning, by the means of a magnetic chord, is communicated directly to the heart. In treading over the hallowed turf that hides from our sight the forms of our loved ones, a feeling of awe and sadness comes over us that almost stifles our hearts with its intensity. Then comes the thought, even though unbidden and unwelcome: What is earthly distinction but vanity, since this is the common lot of all; since death, that relentless agency, will break down the barriers which divide the haughty and arrogant from the most debased and shrinking of God's creatures, and they are all laid to rest side by side in the lap of our common mother earth. They came into the world, served their probation here and are gone; but that mystery of mysteries, that of birth and death, still remains unsolved. The mission on which they were sent, together with the degree of faithfulness with which they were carried out, God alone knows, but we are met on all sides by the mute appeal: Be true to your trust, be true to yourself and your God.

As we pause here and there beside those sacred mounds, to read the inscriptions that have been placed over their tombs, we come to one whom the world has honored, who, by the power invested in him by his fellowmen, helped to make the nation's laws, and by the nurture of

those powers with which he was endowed by the Creator, by his noble qualities and staunch, unsullied manhood, has left an example of statesmanship, citizenship and brotherly love that is seldom equalled and can never be surpassed. There is no inscription to tell of his greatness or his goodness; but he was, during his whole life, engaged in erecting a monument to his memory that will speak on and on in the hearts of men, and will inspire them to endeavor by perseverance, patience and industry to win success as far as may lay within their power.

Remote from this is the grave of one whom the people as a nation knew not, for God had fashioned her to be only a helpmeet to man, but she was one who the people, together with the angels in heaven, delight to honor, and whose image is indelibly inscribed upon the hearts of the youth and manhood that are scattered from one end to the other of this fair land, and her influence has extended across the waters into foreign lands. While she was helping the student to prepare himself to reach the highest aim in this world, she also, by her admonition and saint-like character, pointed him to God and the higher life. She sought to alleviate the sin and suffering of the whole town, which she carried as a burden upon her heart daily to the throne of grace. Her life was a sacrifice, which she offered daily and hourly, for the comfort of others. Her voice among us is stilled, but it will in heaven, as it did on earth, have the power to call about her not only those dear to her by earthly ties, but the unnumbered host which were led through her to receive the second birth.

Here is the grave-stone of one on which is the single word "Father." His name may never have been blazoned upon the pinnacle of fame. He may only willingly and patiently have played his part in this life's drama, in

whatever character fate and circumstances played so important a part in assigning to him. He may have been a conscientious and devoted worker in the vineyard of the Lord, and purchased his own salvation with the souls of men. He may have been one who ministered to the intellectual wants of the youth of our land, a busy member of the mercantile world, a tiller of the soil, or an humble toiler. The words mean the same to those who have watered his grave with their tears, for he was their father.

Here is one on which is the word "Mother." Who has the power of tongue to describe the inner meaning of that name? She may never have done aught else than to bring up her children to true manhood and womanhood. Her name may never even have been heard outside of her own circle of family and friends; but she was your mother. She was ever ready and patiently willing to do those things which no other could or would do, and closed her loving eyes with the burden of your life upon her heart. For a mother's joys can only exist in the happiness of her children, and God alone knows the anxiety with which she watches over them, from the time that they are ushered helpless into this life, until she herself is called away—methinks only to take up her watch on the other shore, to look for those whom God had given her on earth to join her there.

Here is the grave of a husband, while the place by his side is vacant; and although he has lain there some twenty or thirty years, the companion of his youthful choice has no other wish than to be placed by his side. Who can say there is no love that will extend beyond the grave?

Scattered all about us are the graves of brothers and sisters, sons and daughters, who died in their childhood or

early maturity. Only He who knows all things is aware of the unrealized hopes that lie buried here—not only the hopes of the dead, but the hopes of the living that were centered in their lives and success. But all, even the students who were cut down in the bloom of youth while endeavoring to prepare themselves to help solve some of life's knotty problems, would say: It is well to start manfully in the race of life, even though we fall by the wayside.

The graves of infants, who die before their tongues have acquired the power of speech, may suggest to some the termination of unbounded possibilities. Who knows? They may have been sent to some wayward parent to be what the star of Bethlehem was to the wise men of the East—to lead them on to find their Savior, that they might meet them in that land of peace.

And the graves of those over whom whom we place the stars and stripes may give to the dear little flags a different significance. The blue is the emblem of unswerving fidelity to truth and principle; the red is no less suggestive of the blood that was shed, and the stripes of the suffering that those heroes endured in establishing the right. And every soul that was freed through their instrumentality, no matter how black, can not fail to be a star in their crowns.

The graves of those over whom the world would fain write "failure" speak to us with a pathetic earnestness. Be merciful to those who are struggling despairingly and hopelessly by your side. To you may be due their failure or success; upon you may depend their eternal destiny; your indifference and neglect may lead them on to death and ruin.

Sad, indeed, would be the contemplation of the graves of those who were born and reared in foreign lands, and

died far away from the friends and scenes most dear to them, were it not for the blessed assurance that it is only their bodies which lie buried there and that their spirits have returned to the God who gave.

We consign the forms of our friends to the sod, and it is well that the all-wise Creator has ordained a degree of, not forgetfulness, but of quiet submission, that we may be better able to do our duty to the living.

None of those voices had the power to arrest the attention or stay the steps of Mary Grey on that bright spring afternoon. The language which would one year ago have caused her heart to swell with tender memories and deep, heartfelt emotions was inaudible to her. She was hastening in answer to the voice which had for less than one short year been stilled. She stood for some time regarding the grave, her heart too full for even thought.

Everything had been done as she had directed. The grave had been filled and sodded. As she looked at the inscription, the flood-gates of memory were swept wide open. She thought of all that he had been to her, as she dropped upon her knees.

Strange thoughts will sometimes come to us in odd moments. As she knelt there she recalled a conversation that she had had with Miss Eclair. That lady had said: "Mrs. Grey, I have often wondered which of the two is hardest to bear, always to live a single and, owing to our natures, a partially empty life, or to have some one to love and lose him while one still has so many years of life before her."

"Oh," she thought, "I would go over the pain of losing Robert again rather than never to have known him." Then she thought: "Oh, if he had known what was before me, how hard it would have been for him to leave

me. I am so glad that he did not; he had enough to discourage him during his life, without having his last moments darkened by fears for my future. Aside from his sorrow at the parting, he was perfectly willing and happy to go; this is all that makes my sorrow endurable. But, oh! why was he called upon to leave me?"

Then as she went about planting the flowers, a rose—not his rose, but a similar one that she had secured from a florist—and a bulb with its young shoot of a pure white lily, she thought of another grave which was no doubt by this time made. But what a contrast the two presented! While the form of the one that lay beneath the mound over which she was hovering with such tender care still seemed as a part of her life, even though robbed of its own vitality almost a year ago, the angelic form which had only that day been consigned to its mother dust was one from whom the one who had sworn to love, honor and cherish until death do part, had been swiftly drifting, and from whom he had only waited to be freed, even though her life had been one of faith and devotion itself. Oh, how sincerely Mary Grey hoped that her faith in him had never been impaired and that she had died fully believing him to be all that she could have wished.

Then she thought: "O, death, thou art merciful, after all! Although your inevitable summons may sometimes seem cruel and harsh to our obscured vision, yet many times it is only calling some poor heart, that is unprepared and unequal to time's disclosures, to a peaceful eternity."

She planted the rose at his head, the lily at his feet, and a scarlet geranium in the center of the mound. "This," she thought, "will bear flowers this year at least, before the others are ready to bloom." She gave the damp, warm earth the last tender touch, then went and

passed her hand lovingly over the inscription, laid her cheek lingeringly against his name, then walked away, thinking, "God alone knows when I will see that grave again."

She met her mistress in the morning, and in one year from the very day on which she had been left a widow, unused to the tasks of a menial, unused to the duties of a subordinate, she came in sight of the shores of Europe a waiting-maid.

CHAPTER XXIX.

MRS. GREY HAD GONE TO EUROPE.

WHOLE Cloverdale was agog with the news, "Mrs. Grey has gone to Europe. Mrs. Grey has gone to Europe." No one knew with whom or why she went, but that only added to the excitement which ran at fever heat. But that she was gone was certain, even though her best friends had been left in the dark.

"I am glad that she did play that shabby trick on Mrs. Ferris," said Mrs. Jones. "That important personage always acted as if she thought that no one had a right to know things but herself; and this time the widow did not find it expedient to give even her the key to her movements, and it is good enough for her."

"But she might inform Colonel Wilkins of her whereabouts by letter," said Mrs. Dixon, with her usual sly glance at Miss Green. "Was she as handsome and winning as ever when you saw her?"

"I saw her the evening before she left. She was packing her trunk at the time. She pretended that she was getting ready to come back to Cloverdale. I thought then that you would all soon get to see her for yourselves, but she seems to have willed otherwise."

But Miss Green said nothing about the conversation that they had had and the influence that she firmly believed she had wielded, for she fully thought herself responsible for this unexpected move upon Mrs. Grey's part.

While the only other who had any knowledge of the cause was thinking, "If it had not been for that woman I might have plead my cause in such a way that she

would still have regarded me as a friend, and in time I might have won her."

Miss Green did not know how near she had guessed the truth, so she regarded herself as a propounder of a clever scheme—a scheme which rid her of the woman whom she now regarded in the light of a rival.

This coincidence in the minds of the two plotters may seem strange—it may even seem improbable—but since two are sometimes unknown to each other employing the same means for the good of an object, why should not the evil minds running in their several channels sometimes find themselves in the same close relationship?

It was through Miss Green that the news had become generally known. She told it with a zest in which all the controlling power that she could summon up could not hide the relief and satisfaction that it afforded her. She made a brave effort to appear to be totally engrossed with the mystery connected with the departure.

Although her aspirations in regard to Colonel Wilkins were not of sudden development, she had never spoken to him but a few times in her life, and not at all lately. She now determined to employ every available remedy to strengthen their acquaintance. She would have an excuse for accosting him now. She would stop him to tell him about Mrs. Grey. She thought he would be glad to hear any news regarding her and through that might be led to being pleased with her.

The gentleman had not seen Mrs. Ferris since her return from the funeral, and so was not prepared for the news that Miss Sarah had in store for him, nor could he hide the shock it gave him. His informant was not deceived in the look of pain which came for a moment into his eyes, but she thought: "She is far enough away now; he will be sure to speak to me after this and may in time

conclude that a woman who has been too sly to entrap and even now can not be had just for the asking, is after all more worth trying for than a widow who makes all the advances."

The Colonel, all unconscious of the feminine charms with which he was to be assailed, was taken off guard at his very next meeting with the ambitious spinster. He had been to see Mrs. Ferris and had learned all that could be ascertained regarding Mrs. Grey; and since that seemed to him to be the only subject of any importance just now, he wondered a little when she approached him the second time. He stopped and tried to hide the trial that his composure was undergoing, while he waited to hear what she had to say.

That she had something to say was evident and that she intended to steer stealthily to the point was soon made plain. She first introduced the subject of dear Sister Grey, but that failed to draw him out as it had before and her spirits were elated. "He has already lost interest in her," she thought. "The cunning widow may even have thought that distance would lend enchantment and that she would be all the more sure of him, but I will take my chances staying near the man every time."

"What lovely May weather we are having," she began. "How beautiful the country must be now. I envy you the freedom and simplicity of your lives the year round, but it never seems so alluring as in this month of freshness and flowers. We did have friends in the country, and had a May festival at their place every year. Not a real one, you know, with married people and children and everybody, but just us young girls and boys. They moved away last year, and we have not had one this spring yet."

When she first spoke of the young girls and boys hav-

ing May festivals, he thought she meant years ago, but when she mentioned last year, he looked at her as if he expected her to laugh. It had never occurred to him to associate age with disrespect, with the single any more than with the married, but he thought, "It is years that makes the woman, and there is a limit to girlhood, even among the unmarried. I know that I would consider it a greater mark of respect to be called woman." But when he noticed her look of sincerity, he was ashamed of what his look had implied.

But she did not notice, or else had determined not to be exacting, for she went on with unruffled sweetness, "I don't see how we can let the spring go by without our annual merry making; it would cast a shadow over the brightness of the whole spring."

"It would be too late for a May festival, would it not?"

"Oh, no, Colonel; if we just had a place to hold it, we could have it yet."

"I have a very pretty piece of timber land that is at your disposal, Miss Green."

"Oh, how kind of you to offer us your grove. We will all be delighted. But do not consider our interests at the sacrifice of your own pleasure. You know when we young people from town get into the woods we drop all restraint and may become too boisterous to be congenial to your staid country tastes."

"We do not belong to the staid class. On the contrary, we are a fun loving people. I assure you that it is in consideration of my own pleasure that I give the invitation. It always gives me pleasure to see others enjoying themselves. If I am allowed to offer a suggestion, I will say that you give a general invitation to young and old alike, then my sister and I can come out and have a good time with the rest of you."

"Why certainly, we want you and your sister to come out, but you could do that if no one but us young people came. But since you are the owner of the grove, of course you have a right to invite as many as you see fit."

"Well, then it is settled, young and old children, and grown people. And since it is to be a May festival, you will be obliged to have it next Tuesday, as that will be the last of May. I think there is sometimes more enjoyment in one of those hurried arrangements, than the events that are prepared for at such length, for we are apt to weary more or less at the thought, and the freshness is worn off before the time arrives. Next Tuesday be it then."

"Just suit yourself, Colonel, since we are to come on your special invitation. I have had the management of so many such affairs, that I can easily make all the necessary arrangements until then. The most important part will be the choosing of the May queen, not that we have ever had much trouble about that so far. They would like to have had me several times to be the queen of the May, but I have never accepted so far, but I believe if they choose me again I will serve. Wouldn't you, Colonel?"

"I see no reason why you should not, Miss Green. I will cast my vote for you."

"Oh, how kind of you to make me your choice, Colonel. I will not soon forget it. We will have it next Tuesday and I hope that you will enjoy the occasion as much as the rest of us. My own gay spirits never make me heartless or thoughtless about others. It is very kind of you to invite us out to your place."

The days intervening were very busy ones to the expectant Miss Green. The whole town was soon made aware that they were to have a rare treat, owing to the

high esteem in which their townswoman, Miss Green, was held by Colonel Wilkins, residing a few miles from town, and that it was owing to his generous nature that they were all alike to be invited to hold a May festival in his grove situated along the river. They were grateful, of course, but a few spiteful ones took occasion to make remarks when they were told that the gentleman had demanded the right to choose the queen for the occasion, and that his choice had fallen upon the reluctant Miss Green herself, who had at last been prevailed upon to accept.

"That is hardly in accordance with the man's good sense," said one, "for if it had been a queen for December that was wanted, he could not have selected a more suitable personage."

"A queen for December, you say?" said another. "You had better say a queen for your bee hive, to do the stinging for the whole swarm."

"Well, I consider that a weak point in the strong minds that men lay such claim to. Any kind of woman can turn their heads, and wheedle them into arrangements that can can not fail to appear ridiculous to all beholders," said a third speaker.

"She no doubt cajoled him into asking her, and since it will be the last of May, it will not be so inappropriate after all," continued the first.

But those sayings failed to cast the faintest shadow upon the complacency of their object, partly because she did not hear them, but even if she had she was too much engrossed with the weight of her responsibilities. Was she not the founder of this project? Was it not through her that it was all coming about? And, most important of all, was she not to be the queen of the May? The preparations for this part of the program cost the most

flutterings. She could not fail to see a few meaning side glances, if she did not resent them. She was innately conscious that she must present the most youthful appearance possible to avoid open ridicule. So the pharmacist was consulted in confidence about the efficacy of various compounds. That they produced results there is no doubt, judging from the satisfied expression with which she stood before her mirror.

She arranged a wreath of artificial orange blossoms and placed them upon her head, thinking, "Surely he can not fail to see how becoming such an arrangement is to me." And she almost wished that she could be crowned with those made flowers, rather than something not so significant. But she would take a bunch of those early white roses along and place them in a conspicuous place, and some of them could not fail to see the propriety of their use.

She instructed Mrs. Jones in the line of procedure for the day. The aspiring maiden had at last concluded that if the occasion was to produce its hoped for results she must have some one to manage it to her account, and had thrown herself unreservedly upon the good will of that matron; and she, in return for the faith placed in her skill, promised to do all in her power to bring the affair to a favorable termination.

The day came and went, as even such days have a habit of doing. It had been a fever of intermingled hope and fear, but Miss Green considered that the balance stood in her favor and felt encouraged thereby. There had been some vexations, of course; but who had ever heard of an outing without its subsequent drawbacks? So she had tried to hide the sinking at her heart when she went to bring her supply of roses into prominence and found them gone.

But the sly boys had not only stolen her roses, but had scoured the woods and country over, and had plucked and pulled to pieces every flower that they could find with the exception of a plentiful supply of dandelion blossoms. So when the moment of coronation came, instead of a wreath of pure white roses, a hastily constructed one of those ill-smelling flowers was placed upon her youthful brow. But she arose to the occasion, and smiled all the sweeter to counteract the harmful effects of the bright yellow color upon her complexion.

Meanwhile the boys who had appropriated the prospective garland were on the bank of the river in a remote part of the grove.

"What shall we do with these roses?" said one. "It would be a pity to tear them to pieces."

"Oh, throw them into the river," said another, "and let the fish get a shiff at them."

"I know what to do with them, boys," said a third; "we will fish with them. I know that she wanted them for bait to catch a sucker; then surely some fool minny ought to take a nibble."

So in high glee the roses were tied to numerous pieces of cord and fastened to sticks, and then dropped into the water. But since they seldom venture to the surface, the fragrance did not prove a snare to the finny tribe; so, after making various pretensions at pulling out huge, unmanageable catches, and acting in general as boys usually do along an exhilarating river bank, they ambled back to civilization, and were just in time to witness the last scene on the program.

This little drama had been planned and replanned by the two women, but Mrs. Jones depended upon her tact to make it appear spontaneous. So she exclaimed all at once, as if frustrated by the newness of the idea:

"How nice it would be to end the day with a little wedding! Jones will play the parson. Now we must find a man who is worthy of a queen for a bride. Oh; here is the Colonel! Come, we will give you the honor of being the groom—come!"

"Oh, no!" answered the hapless man, coloring visibly; "I would consider myself fortunate to be thought worthy of a good woman, and would not think of aspiring to a royal personage. You can surely find some one better suited."

But the woman persisted, and the unfortunate Colonel could not be false to his gallantry and was just coming forth to take his stand like a martyr, and Jones, who had been initiated into the mysteries of marriage ceremonies and drilled by his good wife how to apply it (even though against his will), had turned his back to take a final look at the scrap of paper upon which he had made an outline of what was expected of him, when the air was rent with shouts from the nearest point of the river, toward which the boys had just that moment scampered.

"Jack has fallen into the river! Jack has fallen into the river!"

In a remarkably short time every man, woman, and child was by the water's edge, but only to find that the Jack was the Colonel's dog, who liked water as well as dry land. The boys, however, stood by as innocent as lambs, while the owner called the spaniel out and scolded him for giving them all such a fright.

They soon returned, to find that the queen had not left her throne, but was still sitting on the stump which had been beautified with leaves and moss, and was waiting for her impromptu groom.

The Colonel walked up a second time, like a sheep to the slaughter, and Jones was about to begin the ritual,

which he had now mastered, thanks to the delay, when a display of lung power sounded from the other end of the woods, and a half dozen voices joined in announcing to the relieved Colonel that he was wanted at the house that very minute, and a hurried excuse was all that time permitted.

The sovereign ruler was ready to at once descend from her royal seat, but the crowd were not going to permit any such move. "Keep your seat! Keep your seat!" said a dozen voices at once. "We will find some one else to take his place."

The marriage ceremony had suddenly lost all its charms for the defeated woman; but since she was given no voice in the matter, she was forced to reseal herself, while some tricky, thoughtless young people hurried the village innocent to her side. This worthy did not seem at all averse to the arrangement. He had long been casting sly, wistful glances at all the girls in town. Age and beauty did not enter largely into the question with him.

He looked at the queen as if he would like to devour her, bitter dandelions and all. He dropped upon one knee beside the stump and took her hand, with a silly grin, into his own, which closed over it like a cabbage leaf. The infuriated Sarah looked daggers at the crowd, but had no choice but to submit. So the ceremony was gone through with to the bitter end. Nor was this to be the end of her predicament. The newly espoused husband hung about her as if he would much rather take a serious view of the matter than to regard it in the light of a joke; and even after she had taken occasion to tell him that he was a fool and an idiot, when the wagons in which they had come had reached Cloverdale and were distributing their loads at the respective front gates, he acted as if his mind was divided between following her and going to his own home.

But in spite of all this, she had nothing to complain of. The Colonel had paid her as marked attention as his duties as host had permitted. "He was willing to play the part of husband," she thought. "It was not his fault that he was called away. He certainly seemed reluctant to go when the summons came, and he excused himself so politely to me." Yes, he had only asked her to excuse him, although the whole crowd were waiting for the little play as much as she was.

So various other little plans came into her head whereby she might fan his interest into a flame. "After you have once put your hand to the plow it is folly to turn back," she thought. "And a woman has a perfect right to make herself as attractive as possible."

But her pains were wasted so far as Colonel Wilkins was concerned, for days had lengthened into weeks, and weeks into months, and she had not so much as caught a glimpse of his fine figure.

CHAPTER XXX.

TOMMY'S PLANS.

THE day after the May festival was a very busy one for Tommy Green. He and his chum had been in close consultation for some time in the stable mow after their return from the woods, and the result was a full-fledged scheme.

They could not carry it out alone, but they could easily get all the other boys to help them; so a meeting was called on the commons, the stable mow being too small to hold the motley crew, which ranged in ages from eight to fifteen.

All the little boys were to be excluded, and this cost them not a little trouble, for what the smaller boys lacked in size they seemed to more than make up for in persistence, and how to elude them was the question. It was only after they were promised that they would be invited to the general "round-up," that those upon whom the fatal age line had been drawn were at last persuaded to go off to themselves; and even then there would occasionally a small straggler find his way into the ranks of "us big boys." But even those who were enlisted in the general cause were not let into its full secrets.

Tommy and his chum thought that more than likely it would be advisable to keep that to themselves, so the rest, who were expected to lend such valuable assistance, were only told that there was a plan by which they could all have a "rousin'" good time if they would help the project along by various means which would be made plain to them; that a great deal depended upon their willingness,

but if they all proved equal to the occasion, they would not be the losers.

They needed a little money, but they could easily earn every cent required in a couple of weeks, so they were all asked how they thought they could best turn an honest penny. Then a solemn promise was enacted from each and every member of the willing band, that they would not spend a penny of their earnings for one month, with the privilege of extending the time if necessary. They had nothing else near, so an old almanac came into good play over which to make their binding protestations.

After all the necessary formula had been gone through with and hands had been shaken all around to seal the compact, they disbanded, but not before they had been assured that any breaking of the rules would be followed by direful results; that the culprit would be obliged to chose between being tied hands and feet and ducked in the river, or a thorough egging, and they were assured that freshness of the eggs would not be an essential feature.

They all knew that escape would be impossible, and also what such punishment would mean at the hands of a score or more of boys endowed with a determination equal to their own, so they wisely concluded to do their best, and by the next morning it appeared like the whole town had been turned into an industrial school for boys. They presented very much the appearance of a swarm of bees starting out in various directions to gather honey. Some of them did turns for the different grocers and took a few ears of popcorn and the rest in sugar in return. This they took home to their sisters and mothers, who they persuaded to make it into balls for them by promising strict obedience for a given time.

For these they borrowed baskets, and "Nice fresh pop-

corn balls! nice fresh pop-corn balls!" could be heard from the various points of the compass at once; while others had been to the river with hooks and lines, and were calling "Fresh fish! fresh fish!" while at a corner of the street that led to the river, a little fellow stood by a barrel, which he had turned bottom side up, and was using as a counter to display his wares, and was shouting lustily, "Fishermen, right here is the place to get your nice fresh bait: a cent a box."

More than one mother found her spice boxes emptied into cups, saucers and pans to supply the demand, while every available foot of ground had been upturned in search of the inoffensive fishworm.

Still others were going from door to door inquiring if there were any stray cats about which they would like to have killed. These they offered to dispatch at three cents apiece or two for five cents. Their method of execution of condemned cats was to hang them by the necks until they were dead. In so doing their pelts were not damaged, for which they received five cents apiece from the village furrier; and many a poor kitty, which could not have been found guilty of vagrancy in a court of law, was doomed to the same fate; and many tears were shed when various valued pets would no longer come at the owner's call.

The dealer promised to put the furs out of sight at once, so that all traces would be covered up. This encouraged a more persistent onslaught upon poor tabby. Oh, what a busy time! It was hard to get them all positions in the great mercantile world on such short order, so some had to even content themselves with holding skeins of yarn or doing other little odds for their mother, while others promised to rid the premises of rats and mice, so much per head. A few determined ones stole slyly

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out with their father's blacking box and brush tucked under their arms, and "A shine! a shine!" was being sung by more than one piping voice.

In the evening at dusk, just when business was at its dullest, they met, but were obliged to go to a different place every time, for some of those who had not arrived at the proper age either did not consider their promise binding, or else were entirely overcome with curiosity, and usually succeeded in finding their meeting about the time that the most important business had been transacted; but this necessitated a change of place.

They compared notes, threw their money into the general fund and exchanged occupations when some of them expressed themselves as tired of the old; and sometimes they found it advisable to engage in something new.

The busiest of the boys were Tommy and his particular friend. There were so many things that depended entirely upon themselves. One thing that caused them not a little anxiety, was the fact that they would be obliged to make a vast improvement in their hand writing to carry out their plan successfully.

Tommy sweetly asked his sister to write the first copy in his new writing book, and then applied himself assiduously to imitating her peculiar strokes and shades; but he found it even more difficult than he thought to bring his rough, uneven scrawl into any semblance to a woman's hand.

The other boy wrote a letter to his uncle, who was teaching school, so as to get a hand that had not been impaired by business. He put "in haste" on the envelope and "in haste for a reply" on the inside of the letter, and the answer was prompt. By diligent practice the boys proved that, although practice did not make perfect, it did improve wonderfully.

At first, when so many new industries sprang up suddenly among them, the Cloverdale people thought it was only one of the temporary fits and starts to which boys are subject; so when the second and third week came and their energies were not yet visibly abated, they were surprised and began to think that this was no ordinary case, and that the little chaps had the "stuff" in them and their respect for the lads increased. So when they asked for various little loans, with which to carry on their different lines of business, they met with few refusals.

On Saturday night of the third week they called a special meeting. It was necessary to know then if the sum could be raised so as to give the two a week for the final arrangements. The boys had each emptied his pockets into the hands of the treasurer or treasurers every evening, so they had not the least notion of the sum that had been raised. The "bank" thought this the safest plan, for fear some of those engaged in earning it might not be satisfied with their share of the proceeds; neither did they know the sum required, although the leaders knew the exact amount it would take to buy the necessary articles. Before they separated they concluded that the thing could be done in another week; and if they did not have enough when the time came, each one who had any credit with his parents or relatives was to borrow a quarter. These were to be returned to them the first of the following week.

But now began the tug of war for the two schemers. In the first place, two letters must be written, one in a lady's hand, the other in a man's; but what proved to be the most difficult part was the wording. Both had written letters, but they had been messages characteristic of themselves, but to impersonate others was not so easy.

They bought ten cents worth of gilt-edged paper be-

tween them, but that was as nothing, and they had to make a second trip to the stationers. This second supply was nearly exhausted before they produced anything like, according to their way of thinking, a love letter should look; but at last they were sent, and the results were now inevitable.

They next went to the clothiers to see if everything would be in readiness on time there. Yes, the articles would all be ready as soon as they came with the money. The boys had told the merchant that they wanted to present a man the exact size of Colonel Wilkins with a suit of clothes, and that they wanted them to be exactly like that gentleman wore, even to the hat, suspenders and tie.

The dealer told them that he had the very articles that they were in search of, size and all, and had Colonel Wilkins' measure and a piece of the cloth from which he had been having his suits cut for years, and that they could have the whole outfit for twelve dollars, spot cash. He told them that he was giving them a rare bargain because they were nice little boys, and wanted to make a man a present.

The boys next went to the second-hand dealer to see if he would be as good as his word. Yes, if the outfit cost twelve dollars and were only worn the next Sunday, and brought to him on the following Monday, and was not soiled in the least, he would give them one-third of the original value. Second-hand dealers are never very exacting, so the boys did not think it necessary to give any account of their proceedings.

They then went to the fellow who had been one of the contracting parties at the little make-believe wedding at the May festival. This poor fellow's body had grown so fast that his intellect had been left very much in the rear.

He had only had now and then a glimpse of his queenly bride since the happy event, although he had walked past her home a few times every day, and tried in various ways to get himself noticed by her. So he smiled in a thoroughly pleased way to receive a visit from her brother, who plunged at once into business.

"Say, Moses, how would you like to go to see my sister next Sunday evening, all rigged out in a tip-top, spankin' new suit?"

He was never called Moses only on extra occasions, but almost anything else instead, and at best Mossy; but this was an extra occasion, and that he realized it fully could be seen by his grins and blushes. After protesting weakly for a time, with his heart in his mouth, he finally consented when Tommy had assured him that any girl would be tickled to death to have him come to see her when he would be all fixed up in the new suit they were going to lend to him.

After the boys felt assured that they had made the chief actor in their little play understand his part, they set themselves about to find some way to earn a part of the money that was still lacking; and since good will, that conquerer of seemingly insurmountable obstacles, was not wanting, with their help and the borrowed quarters, the amount loomed up to the required proportions and they were happy—at least the two. But the other little aspirants were not so sure that they were being treated as boys should be, who had been bending every energy and shouted themselves so hoarse that lobelia and other noxious herb teas had been the consequence.

So when the treasurers thanked them for their untiring efforts and walked off with their quarters and the last day's earnings, there were symptoms of dissatisfaction breaking out here and there. These spread in such an

alarming degree that in a very short time the whole crowd was infected. The last few days had been hard work. Their industries had grown old and did not yield the profit they had in the flush of their youth; so this had to be made up with a redoubling of their diligence. And now that the two leaders should walk off with the money, without so much as telling them what it was to be spent for, was more than they could endure without murmuring. That Tommy and his chum were playing it with a high hand was evident to the meekest minded of the lot. They told them that their part of the pleasure, which they had been working for so unceasingly and in the dark (as they expressed it), was to come off the next Monday night, when they would have a bonfire, with plenty of fire-crackers, and there was to be no limit to the pop-corn and taffy; but these things had lost their charms, and they felt slighted and insulted.

But the two who caused the dissatisfaction were in high glee. They told the boys that the rules of the society were still binding, and that the verdict would be read to any one who dared to indulge in any unseemly conduct before they were formally dismissed, and then went with the quarters and last few dimes, nickels, and pennies jingling in their pockets, to a secret place in the stable mow, to a box which had served as a safe in which to hide their accumulated wealth. This was so heavy in proportion to its value that it necessitated several trips to the tailor's shop and back.

But at last the whole amount had found its way into the man's drawer, and they had the coveted suit, hat, suspenders, and tie—identical with those that Colonel Wilkins wore—and were on their way to the house where Mossy lived alone with his mother, a woman who, blinded by her mother-love for her only son, could recognize no deficien-

cies in him, but on the contrary she set great store by him. He was one who would succeed with the most fastidious and exacting miss in town if it were not for his bashfulness and innate modesty. She had looked with pride upon the little episode at the May festival. Was not the fact of his being chosen from among all the rest a proof of the popularity of her idolized son? So it was with much trepidation and flutterings that she admitted the two boys, who, after hiding their several bundles in an out-shed, had knocked at her kitchen door; for was not the glory of this marked attention in some way due to her for being his mother and bringing him up as he was?

"Oh, yes," she said; "Moses is up in his room, smarting himself up a bit before he goes out. He is getting that particular with himself that I can hardly get his shirt bosoms and handkerchiefs to suit him, although one would think they would break for stiffness. But that is natural with young gentlemen; the more they are thought of, the more favor they hanker after. Oh, yes, go right up; he will be glad to see you," with a relationship smile at Tommy, which was not lost upon that urchin.

They went up, and found the young hopeful, who was still in the act of smarting up, giving the top of his head many affectionate little touches with comb and brush, and trying to coax the reluctant growth on his upper lip into luxuriance by smiling at it encouragingly in the glass.

The sight of Tommy affected him much as it did his mother. A visit from Tommy was, of course, a little different than if it had been just some other boy; and it did much toward strengthening that link when the mischievous boy began:

"Moses, I know that Sis will be as pleased as a pigeon to have you come to see her tomorrow night, if you fix yourself up real nice. We bought a suit to give away to

some one, but will let you wear it once, and you will look so sleek in it that the other girls will all be jealous. Go down to the shed and get the bundles, then you can smart yourself up in them."

Moses was not quite as large as the man over whose measure the suit had been cut, but a newspaper folded across his chest and one over each shoulder, and one half folded down his back, did wonders toward filling the vacuum and helped to give him the breadth and thickness. The hat, unlike the rest, was a little small, but the leather band could easily be ripped out for the occasion.

After his toilet was made, the boys thought the resemblance between Moses and the Colonel striking with the exception of his mustache; but they had come prepared for even that deficiency, for Tommy had stolen his sister's false front. With this they had some trouble. Even with the assistance of scissors and comb they could not get the cunningly contrived little ringlets to take on the semblance of a sober mustache; so they had been obliged to go to a barber.

This man, who had been ministering to the tangled visages of the whole town for a number of years, smiled a little when the boys asked him how much he would take to remodel that into a mustache exactly like Colonel Wilkins'. He knew the boys and the extent of their mischief, but he had not forgotten his own boyhood. So he told them that he would do his very best for them, and it should not cost them a cent; and his "very best" had produced an exact counterpart to the mustache worn by the dignified Colonel.

Moses could not quite understand why his own modest growth, which to him was a wonder indeed, should be concealed; but he would have been willing to submit to almost anything with such an all-absorbing pleasure in

view. But he could not help wincing a little after the mustache had been duly fitted to his upper lip and the glue clung so tenaciously that some of his own tender pets were extracted by the roots in removing it.

The boys declared to him that Sis would never even look at another fellow after she had once seen him in that rig, but that he must not put it on until they came to help him, about four o'clock, because they knew just how the newspapers ought to be folded.

After various little speeches, which they meant to be reassuring, and which accomplished that for which they were intended even beyond the boys' most sanguine expectations, they left and went home.

Tommy knew that his sister had received her letter. He could not tell why, but he could tell. He had been brought up in the house with grown girls, and prided himself on his cleverness in discerning their little characteristics. So, as the time drew near, he imagined that he noticed more and more marked symptoms of a coming event; and that this event was to be of unusual magnitude was also plain by the influence it had upon her whole manner. She seemed restless and preoccupied, and had dressed herself and sat in the parlor the last two or three evenings, as if in anticipation of some coming pleasure. Poor Sis! In the absence of the false front she had always denied wearing, she had no end of trouble trying to coax her own crown of beauty into bewitching ways; but since she devoted much of her time, she was beginning to be rewarded for her efforts.

When Tommy came into the parlor she had just been reading her letter; not but what she had read it before—oh, yes, she knew every word of it by heart,—but it proved so reassuring to read it over. She hurriedly thrust it into her bosom, but not before the quick eye of

the boy had caught its familiar outlines. He sighed inwardly when he thought of the aching arms and anxiety that it had cost him ; but to him the look of satisfaction on the face of his sister was a just recompense of reward. " If I can make Sis look that pleased, mebbly I will write her some more."

He restrained his exhilarated spirits as best he could, when she arose, yawning, and saying that she was sleepy, left the room. " She thinks that she had better go to bed early tonight, if she is to be up late tomorrow night. You had better go, Sissy dear ; the Colonel might have a great deal to say to you, and it would never do to get sleepy before he gets his say out. I wish you one more night of happy dreams before he gets here." At this he could control his spirits no longer. So he rushed out into the stable, where he gave way to such shouts of laughter that Sooky and Billy would have broken their halters had they not often been witnesses of just such scenes. But nevertheless they looked on in mild-eyed wonder. It had the power to draw their philosophic minds for a brief period from their suppers, which they had not yet mastered. He jumped, threw his hat into the air, and stood on his head, making polite bows with his feet in imitation of the Colonel, until he was tired out, and then concluded that it was time for boys to go to bed, even if they were not girls and were going to have a beau.

Meanwhile the deluded Sarah had gone to her room and again drawn forth her letter. The satisfaction to be derived from this message was inexhaustible, and Tommy had come in before she had had time to enjoy it fully. So she began at the beginning and read it all over carefully, stopping here and there to dwell upon something which seemed particularly to strike a tender chord. It was dated the first of the week and read as follows :

MISS GREEN :

Most highly estimable Madam : I hope you will not think me presumptuous for addressing you thus, but I have been wishing to express my regrets ever since I was so rudely called from your side, when you were seated on the stump in the grove. I hope you will not think me presumptuous, but what begins in jest sometimes ends in earnest, and I may yet have the opportunity to show you the respect due such an estimable lady. All things come to them as wait. I will call on you next Sunday night. Look for me.

Ever sincerely yours,

COLONEL WILKINS.

Some of the words were gotten out of scraps of letters which the two boys succeeded in finding; some of them were taken out of the speller and their meaning deciphered through the aid of the dictionary; and had his sister known how often this missive had forced Tommy upon the anxious seat, and that he had labored upon it till great beads of sweat rolled down his hands and face in order to bring it to this state of perfection, she might have partially forgiven him.

"It was all right," she thought, "that I did not answer him. He is so decisive in his speech that it did not call for an answer. It is certainly characteristic of a gentleman in earnest."

She folded the letter and dropped it into a convenient drawer (she knew that she would want to read it over a few times the next day, it would help her to hide her restlessness from the rest of the family), and went to bed to concoct various plans for trousseau, wedding breakfasts and honeymoons. She was so absorbed in these soul-inspiring anticipations, that the drowsy god, in order to get in his work, had to call a halt long before they were exhausted; but in dreamland the same array of pictures spread out on the canvas of her mind: white gowns, bridal veils, oceans of white blossoms and ecstasy un-

speakable. But when she awoke to reality and the world, those coveted luxuries were still things of the impenetrable future; but things that were dreamed on Saturday night have come true sometimes, and hers seemed real enough for anything.

That day at church she took great comfort during the morning services in thinking how envious the sisterhood would feel when she walked into church that evening with the acknowledged prize of the town and community. She felt that her victory would partially compensate for some sneers and insinuations that she had borne since that day in the woods. Yes, she would bring him to church.

She was so deep in her meditations on her way home, that she did not see poor Mossy who was trying his utmost to bring himself and his smart appearance into prominence by passing through the crowd and turning the corner just before her eyes.

Tommy watched her keenly. His plans had been laid a good while and had caused him much worry and some hard work, so he was determined to get all the fun possible out of the result.

She went to the rose-bush to see if the bunch of roses and buds, which she had selected a day or two before to wear on her bosom, were still there. She arranged and re-arranged her toilette, and long before four o'clock, the hour of his own appointment, her appearance had arrived at a point of satisfaction, and she was sitting in the front parlor, going now and then to the front window or taking short walks in the garden and back.

Tommy pretended not to see, but instead whistled "We won't go home until morning," or teased the kitty (he had taken care that this one should escape the furrier's chest) and acted in general as boys do who have

nothing on their minds, until she started toward the front gate, saying that it was too warm to sit in the house.

He knew that his risibilities had arrived at the exploding point, so he put on his hat and betook himself to Mossy's. He found that worthy in a high state of excitement and expectation. He would like to have put on the new suit and gone about, striking blows right and left to the heart of every girl in town; but since that pleasure had been forbidden him, he had to content himself waiting for Tommy and his chum and thinking of the evening.

The boy told him that he could not start before dusk; that none of the swells went before then and that they had all better take a walk before he dressed, because it was warm and those newspapers would not feel comfortable if he wore them too long.

His mother smiled complacently when she saw that Tommy was again with Moses, thinking—well, who knows what she was thinking? It is enough to know that there was satisfaction in the thought.

It was sundown when they returned and it was all the combined efforts of the three could master to have Moses in readiness by dark. The newspapers and the cane helped him out about right, they thought, when he started away. They had never seen the Colonel with a cane, but they thought that he would surely carry one if he was going to see his girl, so they bought one for his imitation to carry.

Moses' story papers helped to fill out his clothes, but they had been resorted to too liberally to add to the gracefulness of his movements or gait, which was stiff and unnatural. He felt anything but comfortable, but he tried to make up in bravado what he may otherwise have lacked. So he walked along swinging his cane, the paper rattling as he went.

The rest of the Green household had all started to church with the exception of the expectant one, who was standing in the hall door as he came up. She knew that it was the Colonel as soon as she saw the outlines of his figure. His walk was not just natural, but he might have corns, and she thought of various salves and remedies that she would apply when the proper time came.

When he reached the door she stepped back and led the way, without saying a word. She was thinking that silence is more eloquent than words; but she was beginning to think it a little strange that he had said nothing.

When they reached the lighted parlor she turned toward him, saying sweetly, "I am indeed glad to see you. Let me lay up your hat, and be seated."

Moses, with all the ease that he could possibly assume owing to the stiffness of the paper, which was rattling in a tell-tale way, had raised his hat from his head and was holding it out to her, with one of his broadest and most winning grins, when she stopped before him and looked at him with eyes in which was blended such an unutterable degree of amazement, anger, and contempt, that one could scarcely imagine that the soft, cooing words of just a moment before had come from the same source. It was the Colonel's figure and wearing apparel. Yes, and a mustache exactly like he wore—but she could not mistake the light blue eyes, the grin, and the cabbage-leaf hand that was holding out his hat. She would know them anywhere.

Her look turned to one of loathing. Poor Moses! he never had had much experience in the courting line, so he did not quite know what this treatment implied, but he began to wish that she would show it in some other way if she was glad to see him.

He had gotten along fairly well in that little marriage

ceremony, so he hung his hat on a chair back, dropped on one knee, and was about to take her hand, when she darted to the furthest corner. She did not study her pose now. Her eyes flashed fire. Her curls, which seemed to arise to the occasion, were standing straight out. Altogether she presented the picture of a fury incarnate.

Just then two war whoops sounded from the hall, and Tommy and his friend rushed in. One grabbed his hat; the other got him by the tail of his coat, pulling with all his might, and hollowing with all his lungs:

"Come quick, or she'll annihilate you!"

Now, Moses had no sort of a notion what "annihilation" meant, but that look in her eyes could no longer be doubted, and he wisely concluded that it could not be making love; so he took to his heels and made a hasty exit, in spite of the paper, which had by this time collected in wads about his body. Poor Mossy! The world of love was still an unsolved mystery to him.

The boys urged him to go home at once and put on his own clothes. He went, but instead of doing as he had promised, he only removed the rolls of paper and started out anew. The new suit had failed to impress the one favorably, but that was no reason why he should not try its powers on the other girls.

After giving the subject some thought, Tommy sagely determined that it would be best to sleep with his friend that night. The boys lay awake nearly all night laughing and talking about the trick that they had so successfully carried out, so it was late when they awoke. With the morning came the reaction so well known to all fitful spirits. Although they tried to laugh it off, they had a dull feeling in the region of their hearts or stomachs or somewhere. They could not exactly give its physiolog-

ical location, but it did not add to their comfort of mind, and they could not get rid of it.

The most prominent feature of the distressing feeling was that it made them think that the end of things had not yet come. So it was without any heart in the matter, but with rather anxious minds, that they went to Mossy's house to get the suit to take to the second-hand man. Their fears had no real form until Mossy's proud mother told them that that young man had gone on a visit to his cousins. He had been wanting to go for some time, but he had got that particular about himself that he would not go before he had a new suit; and he had one now, although he had not let her see it until this morning. He always was a prime judge of clothes, and the ones he had made him look real genteel.

The boys waited to hear no more, but rushed up to Moses' room, only to find their worst fears realized. 'The clothes had gone with Moses, to be gone a week or ten days.

"Moses started early. He wanted to walk five miles of the way, to save expenses. 'The boy always was good at saving a penny, so he went before it got so warm,'" said the woman.

But the boys waited to hear no more, but went out with hearts that hung way down below zero for heaviness and an icy sensation. Their troubles increased as the day wore on. They could tell that the boys were expecting a rousing good time that evening, and were actually starving their little stomachs to make room for the enormous treat. But where was it to come from? was the question in two worried little minds. A part of the money that they were to get from the second-hand man was to go for the expected festivities. But alas! And Moses had promised to pop the corn. Again alas! They

each had a little private stock of corn, but where would they pop enough for the whole crowd? And where was the taffy to come from, and the money for the plentiful supply of fire-crackers that had been promised to the crowd? But the boys determined upon making as brave a show as possible; so they sneaked a popper from the house and built a fire behind the stable, and went diligently to work. But the fire would spread, and it was all that they could do to keep it from reaching the buildings; and the corn smelled suspiciously of a too close contact with the flames. But when they at last had finished, they had enough to satisfy any reasonable set of boys. But where did reason ever enter, when there was pop-corn on the bill of fare?

The few pennies that they could scrape together went for a bunch of common fire-crackers and an empty tar barrel. This, with a couple of boxes which they managed to purloin from the stable, made such a blaze as should have filled the heart of any boy not too hard to suit with pride. But boys are sometimes hard to please when a bonfire is in question, and the two who had promised them such a good time in return for their hard work, could soon tell that the whole crowd was ready to read the riot act to them, and that on short notice, too. So, after they had told them that they were sorry that they could not treat them to taffy, and that they would try to give them their quarters later on, they sought safety in retreat. They would not risk the stable mow, or any other doubtful place, but went straight to the house of Tommy's friend and locked the doors against any possible intruders.

But the crowd was not always to be eluded in that way, and the next evening about nine o'clock two sorry little figures went slyly back and forth between the stable and

pump, with a bucket and pan. It was plain to be seen that they had suffered the full penalty of the law. They had first been ducked in the river, and afterward treated to a volley of eggs—and some enterprising biddy's maternal nest of half-hatched eggs had been the sacrifice.

Words would be inadequate to express the rage and anger of the victim of their long-planned, successfully executed practical joke. She vowed vengeance on Tommy; she vowed vengeance on boys in general; she vowed vengeance on men and boys, and had she herself not been a plotter and schemer of the deepest dye, she would indeed have been an object of pity.

The next day a letter that she received from Colonel Wilkins proved to her that the joke had extended even further. The letter read as follows:

MISS GREEN:

I very much regret the necessity of writing to you in this manner, but under embarrassment I always find a thoroughly honest and open course the most satisfactory. I heartily regretted being called from your side in a way which must have seemed rude to you, but it could never have meant anything to me but just the farce that it was intended to be. I had a wife once, one whose place I could not supplant in my life and home, much less in my heart and affections. I hope that this misunderstanding will not lessen the esteem in which I hope we will always hold each other.

Very respectfully yours,

EDWARD WILKINS.

After her anger had somewhat subsided, and she had thrown the letter into the fire, along with some other sheets of paper which had "Colonel Wilkins" written in the place of honor, she sat down in a thoroughly dejected way. What had been in the letter that he had received to call for such a reply? One thing was plain to her: that there was no longer any hope of gaining favor in his eyes, and that, in spite of his politely worded letter, he could hardly regard her with ordinary respect.

CHAPTER XXXI.

TOMMY TELLS WHAT HE KNOWS.

AS time went on and nothing was heard from Mary Grey, the Cloverdale people had to drop her from their minds, lest they might, perchance, neglect some other topic of interest. Those with whom such things were intrusted, had all that they could possibly do to keep the minds of the people educated up to the point of properly receiving the different little strangers as they finally made their appearance among them; or lest two young people might spend their time in each other's society before their intentions were pronounced serious (which would make such conduct justifiable), or they might even make the fatal final step before it had been fully decided that it would be a proper match; or some man and wife might conclude to sever their family relation without them being able to determine exactly which one was to blame. And having so much on hand, as the summer wore on, no wonder that they had no time to devote to something which had taken place in the early spring.

Mrs. Jones was as busy as she could be concocting various little schemes by which her not too youthful protege and Colonel Wilkins might be brought together; but when that lady's interest (for reasons best known to herself) began to lose its keenness, and she finally manifested an open aversion to even a hint upon the subject, the woman could no longer waste time, but took up with something of a livelier interest, at the same time regarding Miss Green with vindictive glances, which said,

"There is something that you have not told; you have not treated me right."

Mrs. Dixon was no less busily occupied in her own way. She did wonders toward helping the general cause along with her witticisms and pithy remarks, sayings of which Miss Green was becoming more and more the butt.

After her decided failure to favorably impress the one gentleman upon whom she had set her heart, she plunged headlong and unadvisedly into various little stratagems which were, by common consent, pronounced as unbecoming. But a feeling of desperation had seized her. She felt that she must do something to vindicate herself; but the more she struggled to extricate herself, the deeper she sank into the quagmire upon which her own folly had placed her feet; and the look of satisfaction on the face of Tommy, added to the side glances and home thrusts of the women, made life to her seem as anything but a pleasant dream.

But there were three persons who were not too busy to think of the missing one, nor had they left any means known to them untried to ascertain her whereabouts.

Fred. Alton, after making many guarded inquiries, went abroad in the interest of his firm. His friends pitied him. He must be heart-broken at the death of his wife. He was such a model husband, so devoted and kind. They could not see why some people die when they have all that heart can wish, while others must stay on who seem to have so little to live for; but such is life, they thought.

He went abroad in the interests of his firm, but he did very little business. He went because there was nothing to cause him to do otherwise. His wife was dead and the only other one who had any interest for him, he had driven from him, whither he knew not.

Sometimes his remorse would take one form, sometimes

another. At times he would reproach himself for infidelity to his wife. He would feel that he had not been worthy of her, and his conscience smote him. He had never changed in his treatment of her, but he knew his own weakness; and the fact that she had never doubted him only added to the regret, and he would wish for the power to call her back that he might yet redeem his faith in himself by being all that she thought him to be. Then again would come the plea for himself. It was not his fault that he had grown tired of her, for, after all, human beings had very little control over their feelings.

Might not the same fate that rules our affections and causes them sometimes not only to center upon an unworthy object, but entirely against our better judgment, also manifest its powers by drawing them from a worthy one? And then again, was not the fact that he wearied of her proof in itself that she fell short in her powers over him. He had made a mistake when he thought that he recognized in her his ideal. Surely dependence and beauty had no charms when compared with spirit and self-reliance, even though associated with pronounced views.

At those times he could see in himself only an object of commiseration. It was a cruel destiny that would hold out a coveted object until it was within a man's grasp and then allow some evil power to again place it out of reach. He felt that if no meddling tongue had come between him and Mary Grey all would have gone well, and life with her would in some degree have compensated for the insipid past.

But now in spite of the spirit of conceit, which is the controlling power in most men's lives, especially in affairs of the heart, he realized how futile it would be to hope, much less to attempt, to win her even if he should suc-

ceed in finding her. That would only increase her aversion, and if she did not flee from him again, there would still be an impassable gulf between them.

Then again hope would spring up and gain the ascendancy, when his evil genius would whisper to him, "All women are alike! All will yet be well. Men were given such fallible natures to harmonize with their surroundings, and realizing that they are not accountable for the natures with which they were born, women are charitable. Our worth to them does not depend upon the practice of the virtues, but rather upon their natures to appreciate and admire what Providence has placed above them. A woman, after all, need only to be sought out, and if you succeed in playing upon her vanity by a due appreciation, in the face of your own charms of manner and personal attractions, she will not bother her pretty head about your being a moral giant, and the fact that they sometimes hold themselves aloof, is only a farce to lure men to greater persistence. Oh, yes, women are all alike, and the fact that they seem different does not enter into the question. You need only to find Mrs. Grey, and in course of time (and not such a very long time, either) she will think herself fortunate to secure you, and will look up to you with the same blind confidence and trust that made your first wife happy." And the fact that his first wife was content was another proof that the Creator had not made their happiness dependent upon men, but rather upon the just obstinacy of woman's faith in them.

At such times he would be impatient for the time to come when he might seek her out, and go to her in a way in which she could not fail to listen to his suit. He had been a little indiscreet in practising deception upon her, and rash in speaking to her as he did so soon after his wife's death; but after a reasonable lapse of time she

would forget that it had ever occurred and all would be well.

The other man, who had determined, in his own quiet way to discover if possible the whereabouts of the minister's widow, was thoroughly unselfish in his motives. He felt that she could never be anything to him, and that if she ever did marry again it would be to some younger, more talented man. The fact that she had gone to the city without thinking it worth while to write him a friendly letter explaining her conduct, and was now gone so far away without so much as a word, was proof, to his somewhat wounded feelings, that she did not even need his friendship. "But," he thought, "It is hard for one who views the whole world through the stainless window of her own pure soul to realize that there might be dangers before her, and difficulties for which her own strength would prove inadequate. If I can find out where she is, I can manage that she should never come to privation and want, even though I should never see her again. Or, if she should ever come back among us, she might let me be as a father or older brother to her." So, thinking only of her good, and with his noblest impulses aroused, he had no thought of concealment, but went frankly to Mrs. Ferris and talked the matter over with her.

"You who know me so well can not misunderstand my motive. It is not that I might secure a wife, for even if I could bring myself to think of a second marriage, I could not hope to win her. But she is a woman of whom I would not willingly lose sight. Her society is so ennobling. And then again, she is so utterly alone in the world, that unless she has some trusty friend, life at best will be but a struggle to her. I can not bear to think of her having gone out of our lives until I am convinced that

she has gone into a life in which her happiness is assured."

"I have no doubt," said Mrs. Ferris, "that your motive is a perfectly laudable one, and would be even if your object was not so unselfish. Believe me, I am no less determined to seek her out than you are, and if there is any truth in the old saying 'where there's a will, there's a way,' we will certainly succeed."

The woman had a vague, undefined suspicion that her brother had in some way influenced Mrs. Grey's actions ever since his last visit when he had come to bid them good-bye. She had been wondering about his conduct. He had said very little about the loss of his wife, but seemed more distressed at the sudden disappearance of her nurse. This he had been only partially able to conceal, and Mrs. Ferris, woman-like, had always felt in a measure responsible for her younger brother's misdeeds (even from childhood) and now determined to right, if possible, any wrong that he might have been guilty of.

Time went on. Summer had gone and autumn had come. Autumn had given place to winter; and the holidays were fast approaching, and still no clue had been found to the whereabouts of Mrs. Grey. Then a sudden thought came to Mrs. Ferris. Why had she not thought of it before? She would go to the bank and ascertain if the deposits of Mary Grey had been drawn, and, if so, where had it been sent? This might throw a light upon the subject. After the thought had occurred to her, she was not long in carrying it out.

"Yes," the banker told her, "Mary Grey's money had been drawn." On examining his books he found that it had been drawn upon at different times, and that the last cheque had been sent in six weeks before, and that the cheques had been sent by mail, and that the money had

been sent to her address in New York in registered letters. The address sent, he assured her, must have been of some obscure part of the city among the great struggling mass of humanity. "She may be engaged in works of charity there," he said.

This was somewhat reassuring, but the lady had her doubts. "She is more apt to be struggling for her own bread," she thought.

Something occurred on her return to her home which did much to add to her determination. She had a call from Tommy Green, who began :

"Say, Mrs. Ferris, can people be tried and put to jail for lying?"

"I can not say," was her answer; "I suppose that would depend on what the lie was. But I assure you they ought to be."

"Yes, I know it would serve people right, but can they do it when it's a lie about people's character, that makes them want to go away where nobody knows them?"

"No, I am sorry to say that people are seldom punished for anything of that kind."

"I am glad," said Tommy, "because I want to tell you something that Sis has been doing, but I don't want her to go to jail for it. I would not tell it on her at all if she was to be punished, because sometimes I think it's people's fault that she is cross and ugly, because they are not very nice to her."

Mrs. Ferris would have told the boy that she would rather not hear anything that had better be concealed, but, thinking that it might have some bearing upon her friend, she allowed him to go on—something he was not slow in doing.

"I heard Sis say," he went on, "that she had trumped up a story to get rid of Mrs. Grey, and that she had gone

to the city in the spring to get a chance to tell her; that she met her on the street and went with her to her room, and then told her that everybody in Cloverdale was talking about her and saying that Mr. Alton was supporting her without his wife's knowledge or consent, and that people here had hired another music teacher after they had found her out. Sis said that Mrs. Grey did not say anything, but just looked scared like, but she guessed that Cloverdale would never have the pleasure of her society again. I just wanted to tell you, so you would know that she was all straight and right, even if she did not come back here."

Mrs. Ferris had to make a solemn promise that no action should be taken against his sister, and also that she would not betray him. In spite of his having said that it was a trumped up story, she had her own views upon the matter and acted accordingly.

"I will see if I can not succeed in bringing her back without the assistance of any man," she thought. "Not but what Colonel Wilkins is a perfectly honorable man, but I will show him that Mrs. Grey can get along without even him. I know him better than he does himself, and if she does come back, or if he finds her, it will only be a question of time before he wants to marry her; not but what that would be the best think that could happen, but he shall never have that to add to the good opinion of himself: that she needs him as a protector. If he gets her, it shall be by owning that he is very much in need of her."

The chances were that she had changed since she sent the last cheque, but she would send her a letter there. It could but fail. So before she retired for the night the letter was written. She asked her why she had hidden herself away, and told her that both Colonel Wilkins and

herself had been untiring in their efforts to discover her place of concealment, and that she had only that day learned her address through the banker; that the Wilkins boys nor any of the others had taken a lesson since she left. "The time has been unusually long to us. We missed my brother and his wife so much. He has gone abroad since her death, and from his letters it is a question if he will ever return. What are you doing? Come and make us a visit, if possible, if only for a few weeks; or, better still, come home to stay. We need you, and you know 'clarity begins at home.'"

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE TRIP.

MARY GREY had said, "I would rather go with you in the capacity of a waiting-maid than to try to do something else in a strange city," and the smile on the face of Mrs. Enod, who had succeeded for the time in laying aside her air of patronage, had deluded her into the belief that she had decided upon the better way. Brought up, as she was, to believe that a due respect from all whom we come in contact is every honorable person's birthright, she was wholly unprepared for the cold surveillance and looks of open doubt with which she was constantly regarded.

She was soon made aware that appearance counted for nought; that she was not to be taken on trust, even in the slightest degree, but would be required to prove herself every hour and every moment. She had said, "I am willing to learn," but this proved no easy task. It required a continual change to satisfy the fastidious lady. What would please her one day would prove very irritating on the next, and she would be one of the most unreasonable of beings. Thus her duties proved a constant lesson.

Mrs. Enod was a widow. She had two children—Georgie, aged eight, and Helen, aged ten. In New York they had been joined by the lady's brother-in-law, and this made up the party.

The older brother of her dead husband was a practicing physician of some ability, and since he had no other wife, as he expressed it, he was so thoroughly wedded to his profession as to forget himself entirely in his labors of

love. This began to tell upon his rugged constitution in such a way as to require a complete rest, and he had prescribed for himself a change of air and scenes as well. And since he had not seen his brother's children since the death of their father, which had occurred four years before, he had written to their mother to bring them and go with him on his flying trip, and help him to enjoy his vacation.

He had never had more than a tolerance for his brother's wife, but had determined to make the best of it for the children's sake. She was devoid of the principles which, in his eyes, were necessary to make up a worthy type of womanhood—that of a spirit of humanity toward all of God's creatures.

"We have no right to criticise the Creator's work by treating with scorn anything that He has made," he would say, and this he preached more by his actions than by words, for he carried the practice of his words into his daily life.

No wonder that a nature like his was repulsed by the bearing of such a woman. His brother, a lawyer of promise, had wooed and won her from among the trades people; and although her father, at the time of her marriage, was at the head of an enterprising firm, there was a time when his business had not been so profitable, and the strictest economy had been necessary; and it was only by the self-denial of her parents that the things which they thought her rights were sometimes procured.

"And it is to cringing, driving close bargains and misrepresentations that much of the merchant's success is due," thought the young man.

It is strange that the forces which are brought to bear upon human lives should influence so contrariwise. The very influences and surroundings which should imbue

them with a moderate degree of meekness and dependence, makes them narrow and ostentatious, and robs them of the only true distinction of the better class—a nobleness of mind that has no space for that which is small. No wonder that some resort to means by which to impress their superiority that would put a well-bred serving maid to shame.

“The fact that her father together with my brother have left Anna a competency, does give her the power, and a perfect right to conduct herself as she pleases, but it does not give her the right to treat any one more dependent than she with arrogance and unkindness.” He felt that many of them were such as nature had placed above her, inasmuch as they were above the bickering that was the means of earning much of the money that she was in possession of.

When the philosophic doctor first saw Mary Grey, he made the very natural mistake (owing to the look of good breeding and intelligence in her face) of thinking that she was a friend of his sister-in-law’s, and took her to task at the very first opportunity. “Anna, I did not know that you were intending to bring a friend along. It is all right, the more the merrier, but why in common politeness do you not introduce me, or do you think that an old fellow like me is not worth bothering a lady with?”

“A friend! A lady! I do not understand. I certainly have no such person with me!”

“Who is that who helped to lead the children on deck? She is certainly one of your party.”

“That person goes along, but assuredly not as one of the party. She is my waiting maid. I am astonished at your blindness, but I believe you are noted for that quality.”

“She certainly has a face that is all that intelligence

and refinement could make it, and a form that would throw a sculptor into raptures; and I take the fact that I noticed all this at one glance as proof of my clear sightedness."

"Intelligence! refinement!" sniffed the woman in derision. "I think the man who can not distinguish between a lady's maid and a lady had better go to an oculist for treatment. I would think that you could tell by her dress if in no other way."

"No necessity whatever for an oculist. My eyes were never better in my life, but I can see no fault in her dress. She is neat and her garments set off her form admirably."

"Well, I will introduce you, and she will more than likely introduce you to the rest of the servants who may have taken passage with their mistresses."

"You can do as you please about it, but if you do not, I shall certainly make myself acquainted."

But this was easier said than done, for the little waiting-maid kept herself aloof, never going to her mistress unless she was sent for, and this was never unless the man was at a safe distance. For Mrs. Enod, in spite of her own nature, could not fail to see the noble qualities of her brother-in-law, and had fallen madly in love with him through his letters and her recollection of him; and, as is the case with an ignoble spirit, she recognized in every pretty face a possible rival. She had hesitated in employing Mrs. Grey, and even now she would have given anything to be rid of her. "Let her be what she will or may," she thought, "I will make her feel her subordinate position in such a way as to crush out all her false pride and self-respect. To make a good servant of her, that is necessary."

So with this determination she sought her. She found

her in the cabin with the children, who seemed to be drawn to her instinctively. She was amusing them by showing them a picture book and reading the rhymes and jingles at the bottom, and looked like anything but a person who would care to intrude herself upon another or try to usurp their rights. But the woman, determined upon preventing any danger, began :

"Mrs. Grey, your name is Mary, I believe. Well, Mary, I will have to ask you never on any pretense to come to me unless I first send for you. Your duties will be mostly with the children ; not that I object to your society so much, but my brother-in-law is very exacting about the fitness of things. If you understand me, I need make no further explanation."

"I understand you," was all the answer that she received.

"Well, then, take good care of the children, and come to me only when I need you. There, that's a good girl," and she gave her a haughty smile of approval.

The tone and manner of the woman brought the hot blood to the cheeks of Mary Grey. Not that it necessitated a change of manner ; she had sought the position of a menial, and expected to abide by its consequences, but why need she be addressed in such language ? She had not heard her first name since the death of her husband, and it jarred painfully upon her ears. "If I am employed to wait upon her, does that deprive me of the right to be treated like a responsible being ? I may, after all, have made a mistake in myself in thinking that I could live in such an atmosphere ; but what else could I have done ? There was no alternative. Robert would have me be brave, and even in this lowly position I can prove myself worthy of his faith in me."

And so, resolving to bear her trials with Christian forti-

tude, she tried her utmost to win the good will of her mistress. But Mrs. Enod seemed equally determined not to be pleased, thinking it would never do for him to see much of her with that look of peaceful resignation on her face. So she found fault with her, or made her various condescending little speeches, which were harder to bear than reproach.

Dr. Enod did not again see the woman to whom he had threatened to introduce himself that day, nor had any more mention been made of her until toward the close of the second day. Whenever he had wanted the children they had been brought to him by their mother; but toward evening they had come to the parlor of their own accord, where the two were playing chess.

"We are so lonesome, Uncle Doc.," said little Georgie, nestling close to his knee.

"Then you shall stay with us," said the uncle, taking one in each arm. "But where is the lady? Go and tell her to come, too."

"Mary is not very well," said their mother, quickly, before the children had time to reply. "But she should not have allowed you to come here. She should have kept you with her," she went on, turning to the children.

"Mamma," said Helen, "Mrs. Grey is so sick, and we could not keep still, so Georgie and me crept away."

"What! a sick lady taking care of two noisy children, while we are idling away our time with this childish game!"

"It is nothing serious," said the woman, coloring; "Mary is only a little seasick, and I wish you would not persist in calling her lady."

"Well, you are at liberty to call her what you please; but I will certainly go and see if something can not be done for her," said the doctor, true to his profession.

"Wait," said the woman, rising with nervous haste; "I will go first and see if she cares to see you. She is such a peculiar girl, and avoids, if possible, the very sight of a man. Must have been jilted some time in her life; fell in love with some one above her station, no doubt,—and in that case she was served right. A woman in her position should know her place."

So saying, she left the parlor, but soon returned, saying: "Mary does not care to see a doctor. She says that all she needs is rest and quiet; but if you will prescribe something that will help her, I will take it to her."

"I have a great mind to go to her anyway. Sick people are not expected to know what they need." But instead of carrying out his threat, he went to his medicine case and prepared something which he said would affect a temporary relief at least.

The next morning, however, when the children found their way to his room, he asked them to lead the way to the sick lady's chamber. He found her better; so much so that she was in no need of a professional visit, but he knew that cheerful conversation possessed in itself wonderful curative powers after drugs have done, or failed to do their part. So he placed a chair by her side and took her hand, in a professional way, into his own. He asked her name and age in that way so well known to doctors, which brooks no hesitation or denial. She answered his questions dutifully but no more, thinking that "if his spirit is so haughty as not to wish to come in contact with me, he certainly will wish me to say no more than is necessary."

"You need no more medicine," he said. "Such a constitution proves its own best cure."

"I have taken very little medicine in my life-time," was her reply. "I have always had that greatest of blessings, good health."

"But you do need cheerful companionship. Why do you shut yourself up in this manner? As your physician I forbid it from this hour."

Before either had time to say more, Mrs. Enod came hurrying into the room. "Oh, you are here," she said addressing the doctor. "I have been looking for you. I want you to come on deck with me before the sun is too warm. Mary is so much better, that she does not need you. It is a pity" she said, addressing him, "that we can not have the health that some of these domestics have."

The man said nothing but followed her out, but from that time until the end of the voyage, he managed to see his patient, as he called her, every day. The woman remonstrated with him, saying that he would spoil her, at best, with his attentions. "These servants are so presumptuous that one can not treat them as they would like," she said one time in her hearing.

The limit of her endurance was not reached until the last evening on board the steamer, when her brother-in-law declared that Mrs. Grey had earned one evening on deck. "And," continued he, "since you have not the constitution of a domestic, you had better not come." Mrs. Enod knew her brother-in-law too well to offer any remonstrance; but this did not keep her from framing her resolutions. She would see that this should end, and that at once.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE TALK ON DECK.

MEANWHILE the doctor had gone in quest of Mary Grey. He found her with the children. These he disposed of by sending them to their mother. He then told her in an authoritative tone that he had come to take her on deck to enjoy the moonlight. Her mind had been disabused before this as to the character of the man, but she still obeyed him as the brother of her mistress. And walking, with her hand laid lightly on his arm, where he himself had placed it, she told him her story in answer to his questions. She did it with the same obedience that had marked her manner toward him. And here, while the ship was steaming majestically over the quiet waters, which the full, round moon had turned into a lake of molten gold, she told him her life from her childhood to the present moment, omitting nothing but the cause of her sudden determination to come with his sister-in-law.

"Out of her sphere, as I supposed," was his mental verdict. Then he said aloud: "May you not have made a mistake in coming with my sister in such a position?"

"It would indeed have been a mistake if I had had any choice in the matter; but since we can only be partakers and not choosers in this great world, I can but make the best of life as it opens up before me, and try to be content."

"Try to be content! But are you? What if we do try? it makes the misery none the less if we fail. Trying to be satisfied is to the mind much as the faith cure is to the body. We may have all the faith imaginable, if we do not renovate our systems, either by a change of air

and scenes or a suitable remedy, if the others are not within our reach, faith itself will do little. So it is with our mental structures: we may try to overcome their troubles, but if we have no happy thoughts and pleasant occupation to take the place of the depressing forces, our lives will be lived out in simply trying."

"That would be true were we solely dependent upon our own strength; but we have the promise of Him who said, 'I will be eyes to the blind and strength to the weak.'"

He gave her face a searching look. He had heard such things preached from the pulpit ever since he could remember, and had been brought up to take part in the religious services which propounded such a doctrine, but he had seen very few who seemed to derive any real comfort from the faith which they professed. He did not ask her why she did not return to her friends. Even if he had been tormented with undue curiosity, he would not have felt at liberty to catechise her. But instead he thought, "She has some cause of her own, and because she does not care to share it with me does not make it a questionable one."

"Is your faith such great help to you?" he said, still regarding her earnestly.

"How could it be otherwise," she said, returning his look in all sincerity, "when we need only to lay hold of God's promises to realize their fulfillment?"

"And from whence do you derive your faith? Tell me about it, will you not?"

"My faith in the divine power comes from God, its only true source. He just puts it into our hearts to believe, through the striving of his Spirit, and it is through Him that we are strengthened and our trust becomes a faith. I could not help but be a believer. Even by nature

and training, born of trusting parents, I was brought up in an atmosphere of simple faith—faith in God and in humanity.”

“Has nothing ever occurred to weaken your faith in man?” was the Doctor’s next question.

“It has seemed that some are not what would be best for them; but my faith in human nature is not impaired in the least, I hope.”

“Have you never been the loser by too implicit faith or misplaced confidence?”

“It is not necessary to manifest our faith in the human family by undue confidence; and the little that we may possibly lose through our faith in others is doubly repaid by the peace of mind that we are afforded in believing that all are what they seem to all outward appearances to be.”

This latter view coincided in a measure with his own. While he admitted that he knew little about the faith from above, he had always been inclined to take people at their word. “And,” he thought, “I would rather lose the few dollars over again than to look with mistrust upon any honest man, woman, or child.”

“Yes,” he said, “such a nature brings to us much more than we lose by it. Mrs. Grey, if you can hope for nothing only to support yourself, and you take pleasure in labors of mercy, why not enter one of our hospitals, where you can meet on an equal footing ladies of greater culture and refinement (and consequently more congenial to your tastes) than those who may be blessed—or cursed—with enough of this world’s goods to make up, according to their opinion, for all their failings and shortcomings, but which falls just short enough to make it necessary that they should bend every energy to impress their superiority upon others? It would not take you

long to learn the art of nursing; and aside from the hospital work, those trained for such duties can command a price for such services which would surprise one not familiar with the subject."

"I never had any training only in music, and to succeed in that in a strange city would require a greater reputation than I can hope to gain for myself. My husband's death was so sudden and such a blow that I have scarcely been able to judge for myself since. But I would be so glad to do something that would not interfere with my self-respect—something that would not keep my menial position continually before my eyes: for if there is any fault to be found with my country training, it is that it implants into our natures a pride (to which the right is denied us by the wealthy) that causes us to look out upon all the world and say, 'I acknowledge obeisance to none.' I have prayed that I might become more humble. I find myself submissive before God, but never before man."

"Well, according to my best reasoning, those in whom that spirit is implanted must have a perfect right to it, and I would not pray to overcome it. I think the very fact that the Bible tells us that there are some born to serve is proof that there are those who have no higher ambition and who have no pride to be wounded."

"Your reasoning may be correct, and we may have a perfect right to the feeling that we are subordinate to none, but the right can bring us no comfort, but misery and dissatisfaction instead. What would you do with the many who are proud and still must bend? It would be far better if we could humble our spirits, than to have them daily crushed anew under the heel of a world that would deprive us of even a thought for ourselves if they could, and make us think and act only for their comfort and happiness."

"Well, this is an unfeeling world, when one stops to think about it, I will own. Half of it would have to be turned into an intelligence office if higher employment were to be found for all those who would be fitted for such positions. The only solution to the problem would be to treat a woman more like a man; that is, to value her according to her own worth and not by the labors that she may be obliged to engage in, for she is, after all, only doing her Master's bidding when she lives by the sweat of her brow, and should be respected accordingly. But the decrees of the world will continue to frown upon woman's efforts."

"Yes," said Mary Grey, "in spite of the talk about woman's progress, there is very little to elate us, for we are still forced into the struggle for bread, both handcuffed and shackled. While the higher and more remunerative avenues of support are opened up to us, it reminds me of a boat, occupied by a woman, trying to cross a river, while it is making slowly and steadily for the other shore in spite of the crafts whose oars are being plied by stronger and masculine hands trying to impede their passage and landing. The water is just as surely closing in in the wake of the vessel."

"And you think that since the progress is brought about by their own efforts, their right of advance should not be disputed?"

"Yes, and since the water not only closes in in the rear of the vessel, but forces all self-respecting women on."

"Well, that is an odd illustration, but an original one I will warrant, and to the point. There is too much truth in the matter to treat it lightly. The women are pushed into the stream by the physical demands of this life, food, clothing, and a roof over their heads, which their natural protectors fail to supply, and then they add

injury to neglect by denying them the right to sail, even though it is by their unjust verdict that they are crowded on; for any calling attention to the more humble employments of life, is regarded by evil-minded men as a license to enter or approach. You who have never been thrown upon the mercies of a large city, can not realize the extent of the injustice, and I advise you never to lay yourself liable to the indignities to which you would be subjected, nor to try to better the condition of others who may be as unfortunate as yourselves, unless you have plenty of money to carry on your intentions, because it would be like attempting to move a mountain. Your life and good intentions would be sacrificed, even though in vain, and the mountain would be unmoved."

"But since I have no one to depend upon but myself, I must do as best I can. I thought that I would rather be under the shelter and protection of a family, although in the capacity of a waiting-maid, than to be dependent upon the public for a living."

"Well, I would appreciate a shelter lightly if I must necessarily be crushed under its roof. I have had ample opportunity to know just what such protection means. In performing the duties of my profession, I have become acquainted with the inner workings of many homes, and I am fully convinced that if half of the time devoted by the temperance ladies to crush out the saloon, and to reform drunken men, was employed in trying to brighten the path of those who are spending their lives in administering to their comforts, and by speaking a cheering word of encouragement to them, there would be fewer feminine associates for the intemperate man. And if one-fourth the time taken in the organization of societies for the prevention of cruelty to animals, and the money for the erection of homes for destitute women, was spent

in trying to keep such girls as come to them in innocence, from associating with those who will drag them down, there would be much less need for such homes. And the sins and misery that could be avoided could hardly be estimated. God speed the cause of temperance. 'I acknowledge that women are doing a noble work in that line and in assisting the unfortunate women; but it does seem that they are allowed to slip into the stream for the glory of rescuing them.'

"God will right the wrong in His own good time, we are taught," said Mary Grey. "But somehow that affords me little comfort. The wrongs are multiplied and increased to such an extent that it seems that it would take an unending eternity to right them. I would like to spend my whole life, not in rescuing from sin, but trying to keep unwary feet from entering its dangerous paths."

"Since you have the disposition, it is a pity that the means have been denied you. Such labors would necessitate not only untiring efforts, but unbounded wealth as well; and since, instead of being in possession of such, you are even obliged to earn your own bread, let me choose your work for you. You know it is natural for every one to be most interested in their own line of work. Now I am particularly interested in the ailments of the body. Stay with us until we return to New York, and I will secure a position for you in one of the charity hospitals. They are carried on by the churches and people of wealth. And even though you be allowed a generous remuneration, you will be doing a noble work; for while others would be giving what you have not—money—you would be sacrificing your time and strength and doing that for which they would be wholly unfitted and would much rather pay you for."

"I thank you kindly for your solicitude. I will stay

with your sister-in-law, of course, and when we return to America," I will no doubt be glad to accept your assistance."

"Well," said Dr. Emod, "we have been so busy talking that we have not even stopped to enjoy the moonlight, we are such matter-of-fact people; but you have had the benefit of the bracing air just as much as if you had been conscious of it, and I have had the pleasure of your society, and since our interests lie in the same channel, we may in time become good friends, and be of valuable assistance to each other. And now I will bid you good night," he said, leaving her at her own door.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE RETURN.

THE next morning Mrs. Enod caught Mary Grey before she had time to make her toilet. Haughty scorn was depicted upon every lineament of her cold, aristocratic face, and she began in icy, measured tones, which were intended to carry the iron of conviction into the very soul of her listener :

“ Mary, you must know that since what took place last night you can no longer remain with us to cast your harmful influence upon my household.”

Mrs. Grey realized the force of the words, even though she felt their injustice. She was far from her native land and among strangers, and she could not be independent before the woman upon whom she must depend in whatever course she was to take.

She had thought, “ I will go far from friend and foe alike.” She had not realized how futile would be this attempt; for wherever the human heart is found will be found its inherent weakness, and through our shortcomings we are ever in danger of incurring its enmity and ill will. And as long as we remain on earth we can not get away from our worst and most effectual enemy, self.

Instead of allowing the words that would naturally have arisen to pass her lips, she only said quietly :

“ What have I done that should cause you such displeasure, Mrs. Enod?”

“ Of course the people in your station observe no laws of propriety among their own class, but the common prudence with which every woman is more or less endowed should have taught you before this that a servant

has no right to neglect her duties to receive the attentions of her equals, much less to presume upon the attention of a gentleman, even if you had no conception of the fitness of things."

"Mrs. Enod," she said, looking the woman full in the face, "I have never received the attention of any only gentlemen. And such being the case, I did not doubt that his kindness was respectful, and when he asked me to walk on deck with him I accepted; and if I did wrong it was no more than you have done many times yourself. I do not wish to increase your anger, but you have no right to insult me. If you wish to regard yourself as my superior, you should prove yourself to be such. I would not willingly cause a living being pain."

The woman's face was white with rage. She felt that she stood before a woman whom she was powerless to crush, much as she would like to have her proud spirit beneath her heel. If contempt and withering scorn could have killed, Mary Grey would have fallen beneath her gaze as she said:

"Have no fear that you will increase my anger. I would not stoop to being angry with my waiting-maid. But how dare you measure your actions and rights by mine? No worse than I have done!" she almost screamed. "The fact that a lady walks with a gentleman on deck does not give her servant the right to his society, and it would be far better for you if you had learned it before. You may have received the attention of gentlemen, for even they will forget themselves in the presence of an over-willing, scheming woman. But I suppose in your eyes the clerk, hod-carrier, and butcher's boy would also come under the title. How dare you speak of my insulting you? I am only telling you what every lady has a right to impress upon her servants—their place! As for my prov-

ing myself your superior, I do not deign to prove what is beyond dispute."

The fact that Mrs. Grey was by far the cooler of the two only added to the white heat of the woman, for this only seemed to repeat the remark, "If you are my superior, prove it by your manner and not by your assertions."

"I take your dismissal, Mrs. Enod, and your right to criticise ends here and now. So please excuse me from listening to anything more." So saying, she held the door open for the woman to pass out.

She wanted to get rid of her before her courage failed, but she had no sooner closed the door than she burst into a passion of tears. What would she do? She had been wounded and insulted, and now would soon be left alone in a strange country. She had no means with which to remain, and not enough to pay her passage back.

The woman, determined to rid herself of her "beauty" before it should prove a detriment to her future happiness, soon returned. She threw a well-filled purse into the weeping woman's lap, saying: "Mary, since you are not an altogether responsible person, I will give you this to pay your way back. I will send the captain to you. There is a steamer ready to leave the harbor now, and is only waiting for us to reach the landing. You can start back to America in place of going on shore."

"If I had any choice in the matter, I would not accept your money; but as it is, I thank you very much. I may need it sadly."

In the hurry and confusion as they steamed into port, she had only time to catch a glimpse of Dr. Enod's face, as she was lowered into the boat which the captain had ordered to take her to the return steamer, which was even now blowing its whistle and ringing the bell, preparatory to starting.

In three weeks from the time that she had left New York she again reached its harbor. She was dazed and bewildered by the surging crowd of humanity, and had it not been for the young woman whose acquaintance she had made during the voyage, she would not have been able to make her way through the heterogeneous mass that frequent the harbor on the arrival of an emigrant vessel.

Her new acquaintance had told her that her husband was a mechanic, and had been in New York for the last two years. He had gone there directly after their marriage to make a home for her; and that she had helped along by remaining at service in her native town; that they had made the last payment, and that she was on her way to join him in the new world.

They were met at the landing by the sturdy young husband.

The meeting between the long separated pair brought tears to the eyes of Mary Grey. They were so absorbed in each other as to forget her presence. But when he started to lead his wife proudly to a hack, he looked from her to the stranger in a questioning way, that brought that happy matron to her senses.

Excusing herself for her lack of courtesy, she introduced Mrs. Grey to her husband, at the same time telling him that the lady would board with them for a time if he did not object.

But the man was too happy to object to any arrangement that his wife might make, and so the question was settled; and they were soon at the door of the house that had been prepared by the husband. Everything was exactly as the wife wanted it. She could not have pleased herself better in anything, she declared. Everything was commented upon and praised, and the man went about

with the air of one who had done his best, and was satisfied with himself.

And a prince in his royal palace could not be happier or more content with his lot than this youthful pair in their humble cottage on one of the plain though respectable streets.

Mary Grey remained with them as the months went by. What else could she do? The two women took in plain sewing, and soon had all that they could do, and in this way she earned sufficient to pay for her board and lodging. But in their locality there were so many calls for charity that she found it necessary to draw upon her bank account. This she did unhesitatingly, thinking, "The Lord loves a cheerful giver. He has promised to take care of His own. I need have no fear."

She had drawn her last account, which was fast becoming exhausted. Winter had increased their needs, but they were all three toiling courageously on, when one morning a message arrived that Mrs. Tingly should accompany the bearer to one of the city hospitals; that her husband had been slightly injured by a fall from a building that he was helping to erect.

The woman was too frightened to know what she was about or what was expected of her, and went about wringing her hands and sobbing, "Oh, I know that John 'is killed! I know that he is dead! I had such a strange dream about him last night. Oh, I know he is dead!"

Mary Grey had as much as she could do to get her into her wraps and into the cab, which she hailed at the curbstone. Her tears fell fast with those of the stricken woman as she was vainly trying to comfort her. But when they reached his bedside, and she found that he had sustained only a few bruises and a sprained ankle, her relief was almost as pitiful as her sorrow had been.

A doctor who had witnessed the accident had accompanied him in the ambulance. He assured them that although he might not be able to work for a few weeks, he would without doubt be all right by that time.

Mary Grey had remained outside until she heard that the injury was no worse. She was about to step to the side of the cot, when she heard her name spoken, and turning about she faced Dr. Enod.

"I am glad to see you," she said, smilingly, giving him her hand.

"The pleasure is mutual," was his earnest answer. "Had I known that you were here, I should have tried to find you, but without a clue a search in New York is discouraging. Where are you stopping? I will call on you this evening."

She gave him her street and number, spoke a few words to the injured man, and then returned to her work, leaving Mrs. Tingly with her husband.

That evening Dr. Enod called. His first question was why she had left his sister-in-law and returned so suddenly to America. He watched her closely, as if he expected to learn something by her face that she would not be willing to tell.

"I failed to please Mrs. Enod, so she paid for my return passage," was her answer.

The man guessed in what respect she failed to please, but respected her all the more for not disclosing it. It was just as he had supposed. His sister-in-law had told him a story of a lover whom she had left in America. "He was a gardener for some wealthy family," she said, and that "the girl had been stricken with remorse for having left him, and had gone back to take a situation in the same family, so as to be able to cheer him with her society. You know if a girl of that stamp has no lover

she is nothing." He had not believed her, but had held his peace.

"Why did you not say good-bye to me, and give me your address, so I could have found you sooner? I have been back at my practice for several months."

"I had no time to say good-bye. I had to hurry to catch the return vessel, as it was just about to start."

"You must have taken a very sudden notion—but I suppose Anna took the notion instead of you. But that is neither here nor there, since I have found you. I am going to fulfill my promise by doing the very best in my power for you. I was at some of the hospitals today, and succeeded even beyond my own expectations. I have the promise of a position for you whenever you are ready to accept. You are to be taken on trust, instead of having to serve an apprenticeship, and will receive a fair recompense at once. You are to have your choice between nursing serious cases, convalescents, or doing general work."

"I am willing to do anything for which I am most needed," she said, a glad look overspreading her face.

"Then general work will suit you best. It will give you a variation which will be much better for your own health, and will keep your duties from becoming irksome."

"I am not afraid of becoming tired, but how will I ever repay you," she said, giving him her hand impulsively. "I owe so much to you."

"You can repay me best by accepting; saying no more about it, and being happy and regarding me as a trusty friend who certainly means you well."

"I believe you," she said simply, "and I only hope that you show the same kindness toward others that you do to me."

"I try to, but I am afraid that I sometimes fall short.

The human family is certainly in need of all the kindness and sympathy that can possibly be bestowed upon them, let the people be whom and what they may. I have found patients whose maladies yielded to kind and cheering words when all other remedies proved alike unavailing."

"You do a great deal of good, I am sure. When I see others try, it makes me ashamed that I have done no more. Your kindness to me has been a rebuke."

The man could not fail to see the entire confidence that she was ready to place in him, and he was pleased. It awakened his noblest impulses. A worldly-wise woman would have demanded a dozen proofs of my trust-worthiness. Such trust is the natural outcome of a soul unacquainted with wrong.

"Her faith shall not be misplaced." He almost felt that a sacred trust had been given into his keeping, which he resolved should not be betrayed by word or sign.

"I hope that I am worthy of your good opinion and that you will never have occasion to change it."

Any one looking into his face just then would not have doubted the sincerity of his words, for the light of an honorable soul and the kindest of hearts shone on his manly countenance.

During his collegiate course and his labors as general practitioner, every kind of influence had been brought to bear upon his character; but instead of yielding to their harmful effects, it only served to strengthen his character against them, and to despise them the more. Neither did his constant association with the suffering school him to indifference; but instead it increased his sympathies to such an extent as to cause him, through the sensitiveness of his nature and touch, to suffer with his patients; and the smile of bland benevolence upon

his noble countenance was not one of professional policy, but of a tender heart instead. Never during his practice had it entered his heart of hearts to act in any but a disinterested way. His conscience was keenly on the alert to condemn him for any break of trust.

Although he accepted liberal fees from those who had it to give, he also did much of his best labors for the love of humanity; and to engage in the practice of medicine as the means of a livelihood alone would have seemed almost an irreparable crime in his eyes.

His influence often had the effect upon some conscienceless, warped character, during his administration in removing the effect of his last debauch, to make him resolve that henceforth he would be a man and worthy of the image which God had given him.

"A man who, through his own life, can not prove himself a moral healer, has no right to espouse the noble calling of medicine. A diploma of character should be required of every practicing physician," he thought, "and every violation of its principles should deprive him of his rights to enter the homes of an unsuspecting public under the guise of a benefactor."

The two who seemed so congenial to each other, talked on until an understanding had been established. As soon as Mr. Tinly could be removed to his home, he was to come for her and escort her to her future field of labor.

When he arose to go, he offered her his hand with such a hearty expression of regard that it was met with a like response, and she laid her hand simply into his. This served to seal their friendship, and each one felt that something had been added to their lives, with which they would be unwilling to part.

CHAPTER XXXV.

MRS. GREY VISITS CLOVERDALE.

MRS. GREY had been in the hospital several weeks, when one day a letter was brought to her by Mrs. Tinly. It was from Cloverdale. "Dear Mrs. Ferris," she thought; "it was wrong to treat her as I did. My pupils have not received a lesson since I left. What does that mean?" Then for the first time it occurred to her that Miss Green's story might have been false. But the truth of a part of what she said, which had been proven, had made it all seem plausible. "Is it possible that my friends know nothing about that shameful affair? Surely Mrs. Ferris would not have written me as she did, if she had heard it. She would not deceive me, even to add to my peace of mind." She proceeded at once to answer the letter.

This message, which was so gladly received by her faithful friend, was brimful of peace and happiness. "Do not think that I am glad to be away from you," it read, "but I am perfectly happy. I am nursing in a hospital, which is carried on by one of the best churches here, and receive an ample salary. But it does not keep. My pockets have holes and my fingers are oiled, so you see there is no hope of holding money; and when I tell you that I have added caps and white aprons to my wardrobe, you will know where some of it is squandered. I have made some acquaintances here who are very kind to me. I assure you that I could ask no more. Mr. and Mrs. Tinly, a young mechanic and his wife, have been very useful friends. Dr. Enod secured this position for me. I would like for you to know him. He is a man of wealth,

but continues his practice simply because it is his nature to do good and to want to alleviate pain. My duties are light, and I need no rest, but some time in future I may avail myself of your kind invitation, for which I thank you heartily. I have much to tell you, but will wait until I see you. Until then, good-bye."

From this time until spring the letters between the two friends were regular and frequent. Then came another earnest appeal for a visit from Mrs. Ferris. This the recipient gave to Dr. Enod to read, with the question :

"As my advisory physician I ask you, Do I need a rest? Do I look like a person in a decline?"

The man read the letter over slowly, as if to gain time for thought. Then he regarded her so earnestly that she felt inclined to turn away from his scrutiny. At last he said, as though reluctantly :

"A short vacation would do you no harm. I will see that you are granted one. But what do you suppose your patients will do without their 'bonny nurse,' as that old sailor persists in calling you? But it would serve him right to punish him for his impudent admiring looks and crochety ways."

"I will be sorry to leave him; the other nurses have so little patience with him. The rest will fare just as well without me."

"I am not so sure about all the rest," he said. "But will you be so very glad to go?"

"Yes, I will be glad, since I have not seen my friends for nearly a year. But I believe that I will also be glad to get back. I have been so well satisfied, and I have not forgotten that I owe it all to you," and she gave him a grateful look.

"I ask for no other return than that you should be glad to get back. I have been more than repaid by the

sight of your happy face and the good that it has done to others."

Up to this time they had only met in the wards, where she had sometimes assisted him in making some new arrival comfortable, or in smoothing the pillow for the dying. But today he had asked her to accompany him to the hospital parlor. He wanted her to give an account of herself, and tell him if she was perfectly contented with her lot.

"My time and mind are fully occupied, and that is all that can make me happy now."

He detected a tone of sadness in her voice when she said the "now," and was strangely stirred. "You shall start on your visit tomorrow, if you wish," he said.

"Oh, no; I am in no such haste, but will write to the lady first."

"Thank you," he said, as if a favor had been conferred upon him.

True to his word, the Doctor secured a leave of absence for Mrs. Grey, to begin on the first of June. And on that day she started for her old home.

Strange emotions filled her heart. Would the people be glad to see her? Some of them would, she knew. Then she thought of her husband. She could think of him calmly now. The pain at her heart had given place to a sad, sweet memory, that would ever be as an oasis, well watered, and would retain a sacred place, no matter where her thoughts might be drawn. The loneliness that his death had caused her had been partially overcome by her busy life, she thought, "and my friends" and then her mind turned to Mr. and Mrs. Tully and to Dr. Inod. The thoughts about the latter were allowed to take no definite form; but she found that her return to the hospital occupied a lion's share of her thoughts.

especially since it was only a few hours since she left there.

When she reached Cloverdale Mrs. Ferris was at the depot to meet her. No one else knew of her expected arrival, so there were many surprised looks directed toward the lady's carriage. Mrs. Ferris had kept her secret well, even from her husband and daughter. "I will teach the men that we can keep a secret," she thought, "and also that our very breath and life do not depend upon their efforts. I have brought her back without assistance from any of them. It is my opinion that the stately Colonel will manifest more than the fatherly interest that he has been talking so much about when he finds that she does not need his parental care."

Her brother had shaken her faith in fatherly and brotherly protection. She was almost certain that he had been to blame for Mrs. Grey's disappearance, and had not forgotten to add in her last letter to her, "My brother is still abroad."

Mrs. Grey cared little to go about, so a general invitation was given for her friends to call to see her. This they were not slow in doing, especially the sisters of the church, who each found it particularly incumbent upon herself individually to call upon the dear dead pastor's widow. Each one thought "she would feel hurt and slighted if I did not call at once."

Mrs. Jones and Mrs. Dixon were there betimes, but their ally was not so impressed with the importance of the duty and could not be prevailed upon to accompany them. She was not devoid of conscience, and this, alternating with fear, made her pillow anything but a downy one. Her falsehood had availed her nothing; but instead the one whose attention she hoped to gain must regard her with a feeling of aversion. She had not only for-

feited the man's respect, but would be found out and become an odium to even mischief-loving, gossip-relishing Cloverdale.

Aside from her knowledge of her own guilt, her uneasiness was unfounded; for the woman whom she so feared and dreaded was far too happy and self-contained to think of avenging herself upon any living being. Those little injuries which had been done her, although not entirely forgotten, had vanished into comparative nothingness. Her face, which had always spoken of a peace within, but as an index to the heart which had undergone such anguish in the last two years and had continually been cruelly lacerated and torn anew by unfeeling hands, had shown to a close observer a look of pleading helplessness, which seemed at times to say: "Must I endure alone? Is there no one to help me bear this?"

But it had now regained its wonted strength, and bore a look which gave evidence that the small things of this life could neither make nor mar her happiness. And as the placid surface of a stream is an indication of a smooth bed or the depth of its waters; so the illumination of her countenance gave evidence of a depth acquired by culture and refinement, and the quieting influence of a peace from God over all.

Mrs. Ferris, in order to avoid to a degree the questions and surmises that would otherwise be inevitable, sent an item to the "Cloverdale Inquisitive" which came out in its columns of "Our neighbors in and about town," and read as follows:

"Mrs. Grey, who has for some time been doing such noble work in one of the church hospitals of New York, is spending her vacation in Cloverdale, the guest of Mrs. Ferris and other friends."

This had the effect of abbreviating their questions to some extent, but she was accosted at every meeting with "So you have got to be a trained nurse? Do you like the work better than giving music lessons?"

Among the calls which she most enjoyed was that of Deacon Hill, his wife Betsy and daughter Bessie. If the affable deacon's air toward Mrs. Grey was somewhat proprietary, it should have been forgiven him. For was not her success and changed appearance partly due to him? Had he not defended her and laid himself open to ridicule in putting the check rein upon some of Cloverdale's busiest tongues?

He rattled on at such a pace that, as usual, his wife was only vouchsafed a remark at long intervals, but she had been Mrs. Deacon Hill so long that she felt quite at home in occupying a subordinate position in conversation; and hadn't she just as good cause to be proud as if she had said some of those things which were so full of sly meaning herself? So she quite contented herself by watching his shrewd, comical face and admiring his witticisms and sage remarks.

"Has Sarah Green been to see you yet?" he said to Mrs. Grey. He had something on his mind that he wanted to say about that damsel, and was going to steer straight to the point. But since Mrs. Grey simply said, "I have not yet seen her" he had to plunge into the subject without any help.

Ever since the May festival, a year ago, and the spiteful talk that it had occasioned, he had felt that the butt of all those stinging thrusts was as much sinned against as sinning and had missed few occasions to make his opinion known. So he said without further preliminary:

"I don't believe that she would be such a bad sort of a person if she was let alone. You know that the constant

dripping of the water will even wear away hard stone. The patience, that is not worn out of her breast, is constantly kept in a ferment by rankling ridicule. I say it is cowardly to treat a single woman, who has no one to stand up for her, so mean. If a man is insulted, he takes the sweets of revenge out of the other fellow's eye, and leaves a black mark in return. If a married woman is abused, she has her husband and children to comfort her, but an old maid has nothing to do but keep old sores bleeding by brooding them over or by trying to get rid of them by scratching the source, which only makes them become more irritated and eat deeper into the flesh. What if she does want a man? She has a perfect right to want one. It is the nature that God gave her; and judging from the number of us unworthy fellows who have wives, it looks like some other women wanted men or took them without wanting them, which would still be worse. It may have been the fault of nature or providence, or whatever makes faces pretty, that she did not get one; or she might even have been more particular than the rest of you. I know that she would be better off with a family. Then she would have business enough of her own to take up her mind and would not have to meddle with her neighbors for pastime.

"Betsy is a prime good wife, but she herself could not tell what kind of an old maid she would have made. She may have had a narrow escape from turning into a crabapple herself and ought to thank providence continually that I was not too hard to catch. And, remembering upon what your own success and happiness depended, none of you married women ought to be too hard on Miss Green."

His wife looked as if she felt the weight of his words and sanctioned every one of them. She had always felt

thankful that she had won the good Deacon, and, of course, every other woman was to be pitied.

"But Betsy would be no worse off without me, than I would be without Betsy; because I would be a poor stick and a crooked one, too," he concluded.

After he had praised, petted, and cajoled Mrs. Grey to his heart's content, and seasoned the interview by his outspoken opinion of abused spinsterhood, the Deacon and his family took their departure, and Mrs. Grey was left to receive other callers.

She and Mrs. Ferris had repaired to the shady piazza at the east end of the house. It was late in the afternoon, and they had almost despaired of seeing Colonel Wilkins for another day, or it might be a week, when his familiar form was seen entering the front gate. He proceeded toward the house with his face partly averted. Mrs. Ferris pushed her guest hastily through the open door, then turned to the man who had by this time reached the steps. She hardly took time to greet him before she said:

"Guess who is here. I shall not allow you to see until you have guessed."

"I don't know unless it is your brother or Mrs. Grey. Which one is it?"

In answer Mrs. Grey came toward him. She gave him her hand with a glad smile.

"We were beginning to fear that you would not come again today," she said.

"We certainly would have taken a drive to the country tomorrow if you had not," said Mrs. Ferris. "We would not have waited much longer."

"Then I am sorry that I came in," was his gallant rejoinder, "but this need not interfere with your coming." He regarded Mrs. Grey long and earnestly. "The boys

and Aunt Minnie will want to see you. Please do not remonstrate, but come out early and stay late. We will look for you, and you would not care to disappoint us, I know."

"I have not long to stay, but since I will see you to-morrow I can talk to you then," he said. Then making sure that his invitation had been accepted, he soon took his leave.

He had been surprised at the change in the face of Mrs. Grey. It had always appeared thoughtful and was none the less so now, but the sadness had entirely disappeared.

The change had all come about without his assistance. His well-meaning heart experienced a stab when he thought "she did not need me," and still worse, when he thought that some one else might have had the privilege that would have been so keenly appreciated by him—that of being a friend and adding to her happiness. He had asked so little, but had been denied even that. He had asked only that he might be as a father or elder brother to her, but she had received from some other source what he would gladly have laid at her feet. The spirit of solicitude which had burned in his manly heart must be consumed by its own fires.

None of the Wilkins family attempted to conceal the look of joyful anticipation that shone on their faces the next day when the hour for the company's arrival approached; and each one vied with the other to show Mrs. Grey the greatest kindness and attention. They sang, played, and talked together and were happy.

In the afternoon the whole company repaired to the woods.

"I will walk with Mrs. Grey," said Colonel Wilkins, and he soon led her apart. Here she told him where she had been and what she had been doing, but never dream-

ing how eagerly he drank in every word and thirsted for more. But true to his gentlemanly instinct he forbore to question her, but let her tell what she would.

"After all," his conscience kept repeating, "if you only had her interests at heart, you should be perfectly content to see her happy," and he tried to reason with his heart that he was. But it was plain that if he only had her happiness in view, he had figured largely in his plans to bring it about; and he was certain by this time that some one else had usurped the place that he had hoped to hold.

She was as cordial as ever in her manner toward him, but this only confirmed the belief that the innermost thoughts which, seemed to afford her such happiness, were not of him. She herself might never have analyzed them, but they would never be of him.

His own thoughts were so well concealed that Mrs. Grey fully believed that the heart of her companion was as light and joyful as her own, so she chatted gayly on. "It would have been selfish to spoil her day of innocent pleasure by my selfishness," he thought; "and it is best that she should not know—best for us both."

That evening the man went alone to that moss-grown grave, where he had seldom gone without his boys. He stood for a long time, his head uncovered and bowed, beside the mound. Every bit of the tenderness that the long-lost form beneath had ever caused to thrill in his breast was aroused to acuteness.

"It is not that I have forgotten you or love your memory less. I would have given my own life to save yours, and would ask no greater boon on earth—or in heaven either, I am afraid—than the power to call you back. But I can not. You are so far away, and my life is lonely. It would not have been disloyalty to you, but I need the

presence of a good woman to comfort and cheer me at times, when I can not manage myself.

"She is so near akin to you in her guileless womanhood that it would almost have been like a renewal of life with you. But this second joy has been denied me, and I do not murmur. One sweet life was entrusted to my keeping, and although I was faithful to my trust and dealt with her as I would have Him deal with me, He may not regard me worthy of another."

He replaced his hat and walked away, a manly resolve upon his face. Some other man, with a less fervent love, would have cast all noble impulse to the wind; but his resolutions once formed were not to be broken. Her enjoyment should not be trammelled. It caused him a pang when he thought that Fred. Alton might have followed Mrs. Grey and won her. "But if he makes her happy, what is it to me? It might about as well be him as any one else. If he is only trifling with her, or fails to make her a good husband, he had better never cross my path."

That evening before Mrs. Grey retired she wrote a few lines to Miss Green. The demand for that admonitory speech of the Deacon's was not as stringent as he may have supposed it to be, but it no doubt produced some good effect, as anything so well meant should. Each member of that select little company, the Deacon's hearers, had cultivated that little germ charity (which in a crude state and in a greater or less degree is a native of every human heart) until they had coaxed it into a hearty, full-grown plant, and it shed its refreshing influence over the whole area of its habitation and every act of their lives was tempered thereby. But the writing of this letter, no doubt, was due to the Deacon's words.

Mrs. Grey wrote: "Miss Green, you have no occasion

to fear me. I assure you that I bear you no ill will. It would be an unworthy creature, indeed, that would harbor a spirit of resentment, even if it did not eat as a canker into the heart and leave us the greatest sufferers thereby. I freely forgive as I hope to be forgiven."

The kind-hearted woman hardly knew how to word her letter, lest it might make matters worse instead of better.

"You can easy talk about forgiving, my good lady, since you have everything and I have nothing. People who are happy can easy talk, while the rest of us must drag out our existence as best we can. But we can not well do it without coming in contact with the rest of the world sometimes. If we do have cankers at our hearts, who cares? There is not one in a dozen who would not take their nails and scratch the sore still deeper, then stand off and wonder at the result as if it had not been their own work."

So far her own views coincided with those of Deacon Hill, that she was as much sinned against as sinning. Who is there that is able to say that she was not? In this great world every question must be presented to us in its different lights; and even then who is there among us that has the power to form a just decision?

CHAPTER XXXVI.

DOCTOR ENOD'S HOBBY.

THE ten day's leave of absence that had been granted Mrs. Grey was soon spent. She had enjoyed her visit, but was now rested; and since the time had come for her to return to her duties, she must go. She declared that she now needed rest from rest, and so she went.

Her friends, only too thankful that she had found her life work, did not try to detain her, but bade her God speed instead; and many were the good wishes that went with her.

It was well that she did not see the look of tender longing that came for a moment into the eyes of one, when he clasped her hand at parting, or it would have robbed her of some of her own peaceful pleasure. But the man, true to his manhood and his strength, held his secret as being too sacred for human eyes, and none were ever the wiser.

Mrs. Ferris' faith in the disinterestedness of men was somewhat strengthened. "He may, after all, have been thinking of her good alone and not the confirmation of his own happiness. I am afraid that such cases are rare. But she is worthy of such a regard as is not due to all mortals. I don't suppose that she had an unkind thought for any of her old tormentors, and there is not one in a hundred that would not have posed more or less as an injured person and a martyr. Instead she showed the most thoughtful solicitude, lest through her the thoughts of their own faults might cause them uneasiness. She could not help finding out while here that Miss Green's

story was partly false, but she had not a word of blame or resentment for even her."

"If Mrs. Grey had let those people see that they possessed a power over her to wound, they would have forgiven her long ago for being a better woman and having more friends than they. But if the foe must be won over by giving him the conquest, he could not prove a desirable friend, but may only wait a favorable opportunity to strike anew. When the enemy sees that even his best efforts fail to subdue, he surely should have the principle to acknowledge defeat and retire from the field; but the ignoble foe sees only the fortress (even though it be erected of purity and its God-given strength) and recognizes in it only an impediment to victory, and his forces of offense are strengthened within him." Mrs. Ferris concluded her meditation by saying to herself, "I am glad that she is far enough away now from those who would have torn her reputation piecemeal, if for no other reason than to ravish their eyes upon the, to them, agreeable spectacle."

As the train neared the town, where she had stopped upon two previous occasions, the first time the saddest day of her whole life, the second time a year later and a year ago that day, the conductor told her that she would be obliged to wait an hour and a half for her train. But instead of regarding this as an inconvenience, Mrs. Grey received the information with pleasure and soon once again stood beside her husband's grave.

She knelt down upon the beautiful green grass and prayed. She prayed that the Father who had watched over her husband and taken him unto himself, would alike be her stay, and that she would never be led to forget the last words that his dear lips had spoken, "You will meet me in heaven, I feel sure of that, Mary."

She prayed that she might, by the grace of God, be able to meet him in that better world, and that no matter where her earthly duties and earthly needs might lead, she would always be able to conduct herself in a way that would not wound his dear heart if he knew.

She arose from her knees with a look which showed that her petition for strength had not been in vain. She culled the dry leaves from the rose bush, which she had planted just a year ago. This had grown well and had two tiny buds. "One for me and one for Robert," she thought, "and since I will soon be far away again, I will take mine with me." She plucked it tenderly and placed it into a receptacle in the bosom of her dress, and no human eyes but her own ever beheld it again. It was held as the most sacred among her earthly treasures.

The lily also had grown and bid fair to soon shed its beauty and fragrance over the lonely grave. She had purchased enough ground to admit of another grave, but she was destined never to fill the place by his side.

"I will meet you in heaven, Robert, and we will know each other and be glad," she said, turning away, and soon the train bore her on toward the end of her journey.

The patients and doctors alike were glad to have her back at the hospital. She had not had the experience of some of the other nurses, but since training is too often used as a veil to conceal a want of skill, her lack of skill made her natural ability all the more apparent. Her hopeful face did as much to drive away despondency as her soft hands did to alleviate pain. The doctors, realizing the efficacy of such a remedy, would rather have parted with any other nurse; but they were destined soon to lose her.

Summer and autumn passed quickly. Appreciated by those under whom her position was held, and blessed by

those who had the good fortune to come under her care, she asked no more. But as fretting and longing will never bring happiness and contentment, but will more often lessen our opportunities, so an acquiescence to fate will sometimes insure an overflow to those who expect least.

As time went on, Mrs. Grey did not forget her humble friends, but found many opportunities to spend an hour or two with Mrs. Tingly. There was a time approaching in this happy little wife's life when she was in need of the companionship of one of her own sex. Her husband was all and even more than she could ask, and his tenderness and solicitude was unbounded, but she was in need of some one who could understand her. Although a man may be the kindest of husbands and fathers, he can never enter into the intricacies of a mother's nature. Mrs. Grey, understanding her needs, soon spent all her leisure time at her happy cottage, much to the joy of the little woman.

One day there was a hurried demand for Mrs. Grey at the hospital. No one else knew where she could be found, so Dr. Enod (who had of late lent such valuable aid that one of the hired assistants could be disposed of) volunteered to go for her. He did not err in his judgment when he sought her at the mechanic's humble home.

"She is truly an angel of mercy," he thought. "When she is with the proud, she meets them on an equal footing; but here she is as simple in her manner as if she had never known other society. If some of those whose wealth and position blind them to true worth, and still want to monopolize the title of lady, had her graces and sweetness, they would never have to flee to the time-honored name of woman as to a retreat. It is those to whom the world would grant the title that have depreciated its value."

During their trip back, he said: "Would you like to spend a few weeks with your old friends? They are the first ones you found in this city of struggles, and I still cling to the belief (although modern custom would rule out all such old fashioned sentiments) that our old friends have the first claim upon us."

"I would be so glad if I could," was Mrs. Grey's answer. "Mrs. Tinky is so far away from home and friends. But do you think that I could be spared? I have dreaded to ask. I could save them the expense of a nurse, something that they can ill afford."

"Yes, you can be spared. I will intercede for you. Those benevolent institutions are founded with a view of doing a kindly office for any who may come under their notice. Surely this woman, who is a stranger in a strange land, has need of a friend in her trials, even though she is not an object of charity. But do you mean that you would do this free of charge?" He looked at her as if he objected, yet hoped that she would merit his disapproval.

"I do not feel that I would be working for nothing, for I have been more than paid in advance. She would not allow me to come with such an understanding, I know, so I will tell her that I need a few week's rest, and if she does not charge too high board I would like to spend the time with her. I can hide my true mission and come into the place of nurse so naturally that she could not object."

"If the world contained more women like you, we could not fail to be a happier people."

"Oh, no," she said quickly, "do not praise me. I have done so little real good, that I would have to exert myself to the uttermost to the end of my life to be worthy of such an opinion."

"Your own humble opinion of self is the result of being reared in the country, away from the jealousy of the great unthinking masses, where each one must make the most of every worthy act, however small, or be eclipsed by some more pretentious contestant. But with most of them doing good is a secondary matter, if not entirely forgotten. Their best efforts are put forth to avoid being outdone in matters of dress and appearance, and this is no light struggle, I assure you.

"I can not see why a man, who wishes to bring up his girls to a noble type of womanhood, should object to the country as a home. There is an innate modesty, a self respect and over all a heart throbbing for humanity in the intelligent country bred young lady, which are crowded out of the existence of the city girl before she has reached the long dress period, for they are taught by example and by pretext that a faultless attire and a certain manner, no matter how artificial and affected this may be, are her predominant requirements. This is not only a waste of the freshest years of their lives, but it totally unfits them for either a thorough cultivation of the intellect or a useful life.

"If I understand God's great plan, our bodies were given us only as an abiding place and a fit protection for our brains and hearts, which in turn are entrusted with our spirits or souls. But instead of training our bodies to do the bidding of the best impulse of our souls, our souls are enslaved, crushed out in decking and bringing our poor bodies into prominence. Some people would almost barter their inheritance to the better world for the sake of appearance. Under the pure air of heaven, the character has an opportunity to grow and strengthen without being warped and trammelled by its fellows."

"Yes, but you will acknowledge," said his companion,

"that city people think it necessary that a country bred person should undergo a new process of creation before they are admissible into their society. And then this very spirit of independence and self respect, that we are born with and permitted to foster, makes it all the worse for the country girl, for she is satisfied in the belief that she is inferior to none. She is taught in the Bible that she was created by the same God and redeemed by the same Christ. She is constantly under the ennobling influences of the Creator's works, and is inspired by the whisperings of nature. She feels that she is a freeman born and that no one has a right to rob her of her birth-right. Then when they drift into the city, as many are obliged to do, in search of employment, they are entirely unfitted for the life. They will either rebel at the assumed superiority of those who might not even have been as well brought up as they themselves, or else have their self respect crushed out by the coldness and indifference of those with whom they come in contact, and their downfall is certain.

"Oh," she went on, "if I could only warn every country girl, who was reared in a home of love, no matter how humble, to remain in contentment in its seclusion, rather than try the strange ways of a city, how many less cries from the depths of lost souls would be daily and hourly ascending to heaven."

"Yes," said Doctor Enod; "some simpering city people think that those from the country should undergo a new birth before they are fit for their august presence, while if they had the depth of character to appreciate them they could learn from them such a lesson of lofty thought and noble aim as would more than compensate for the drill in the forms of city life. Things which the average country girl, if she has not already imbibed too

much good sense, could learn in a few weeks at farthest.

"You may regard me as an enthusiast on the subject of dress reform, and as such apt to overrate the import of my hobby, but I see so many, both men and women, decked out in such splendor, that I am forced to wonder if the meager soul beneath could be worth one half of the cost of the attire in the pure eyes of God. I see no harm in looking well, but it should never be at the sacrifice of worthier objects.

"Yes, if you could sound such a warning as you spoke of there could not fail to be joy in heaven over the result, even if some indolent people were obliged to exert themselves for their own comfort. As I have said before, my profession gives me an insight into many lives and homes, and I see things which would otherwise be unknown to me. I have noticed the change of servants in some elegantly furnished homes owned by people of ordinary and sometimes inferior intelligence, and when by the tap of a silver bell the new girl was summoned into our presence, she would come in with a timidity wholly out of keeping with the quiet dignity stamped upon her innocent features. Even a casual observer could see that the shrinking was not that of a dependent or inferior soul, but caused by her first introduction into so much splendor and coldness, and that her innermost soul was crying out for a little of the love and sympathy to which she had been accustomed—something to fill the void caused by the separation from all that is dear to her. This being denied her, she sets her face stolidly against fate until her heart is starved and life becomes intolerable. Then when she can hold out no longer she seeks companionship where it can be found.

"I have heard it said that the downfall of a country girl is almost certain in a large city, and the general

verdict is that they are too easily bewildered by so much grandeur; but any one who gives human nature a second thought knows this to be false. It is because life to them has been robbed of its dignity, and they have not acquired the fortitude of those who have always been driven from 'pillar to post.'

"In her new quarters the independent young farmer, or the self-respecting country school teacher, who was wont to pass his leisure time in her society, will probably come to see her a few times at long intervals, and then cease his attentions entirely. Then the poor girl, who is forced by necessity to occupy a position which is perfectly odious to her, and lowers her in the eyes of her former friends, finds herself sinking lower and lower in her own estimation, and the result is inevitable. And all this time people are organizing societies for the uplifting of humanity, and praying for the Lord to undo the result of the wrongs which they are wilfully committing. 'Verily all that cry, Lord, Lord, shall not enter into the kingdom.'"

"When I think of all those things," said Mary Grey, "I am impatient for strength. Oh, if I had the power of an army, I would gladly expend it all in helping woman-kind to retain her purity. But what can one puny woman do against what is countenanced and sanctioned by the multitudes?"

"I have seen people," said Doctor Enod, "and strong ones, too, who lost what natural strength they possessed by undue anxiety; and I will insure one little woman in particular that worry will only cause her own unhappiness and do others no good.

"You did not know that I am gifted with the spirit of prophecy," he went on, assuming a lighter tone as they drove through the hospital gates. "I see a certain zeal-

ous, kind-hearted lady, enjoying all the opportunities that she has so desired, and with wealth at her command she is going about doing good. She is not one of the kind that long for such opportunities until they have been granted them, and then forget all about their good resolves, but she is going nobly on executing the plans which have so long been formed in her busy brain. She does not seek the approval of men, nor the rewards of earth, but is hoping only to hear that welcome approbation that our heavenly Father has in store for the finally faithful, and as a reward a home with God and the angels."

He had been looking straight before him as if in space he beheld the decrees of fate, but now he turned his gaze full upon her face. "Mrs. Grey, behold in yourself the object of my visions. I hope that for once I have not erred in penetrating the future." He had again drifted into serious tones. She looked up in time to note the earnest look in his eyes as they were bent upon her, and for the first time she could not meet his gaze; for the first time her tongue refused to perform its accustomed office, and the words of appreciation, which would have arisen to her lips, did not find utterance, and she left him with a simple "I thank you," and went in through the hospital doors.

Mrs. Grey did not again see the doctor for several days, then came an official letter from the superintendent saying that if Mrs. Grey so desired she could be spared for a few weeks. Nor did she see her friend before she left, and she wanted to thank him for his interest in her behalf. She could not rid herself of a slight feeling of disappointment. His manner toward her the last time they were together had filled her heart with a shy pleasure; and as the budding spring arouses a glad and joy-

ous expectation of its termination, summer, so the human heart, after it has once been warmed by a ray of happiness, can only find the realization of contentment in a flood of light.

Mrs. Tingly was no less pleased than surprised when Mrs. Gray walked unexpectedly in, announcing her intention to remain with her. "I need a change," she said, "and I would rather come to you than go anywhere else. I do not need rest, only a change," she went on, checking the remonstrance that would have arisen to her friend's lips.

The woman was too well pleased to raise any further objections, so the matter was settled. When the young husband came home in the evening he was overjoyed to find his beloved wife in such good hands. "I can now go about my work and feel as well satisfied as if I was with Lucy myself," he said gratefully.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

NAMING THE BABY.

IT was now ten days since Mrs. Grey came to the home of her friend. Little Mary was just one week old, and had been named, on the very eve of her birth. "I will name her for you," said the mother to Mrs. Grey, after pressing her new-found joy to her heart. And any one who could have looked into the depth of her mother's heart could not have failed to see that she was indeed conferring an honor upon Mrs. Grey. This simple token of appreciation meant much to that lady, knowing that it was caused by the gratitude that flooded the whole being of the thankful woman.

"Don't you think that she should have a double name?" said Mr. Tinly, a look of concern coming over his face, which was continually brimming over with smiles.

"I found the first, you may add the middle name," answered the wife; "but you must not want to call her anything that would spoil the sound of my choice, Mary."

"I am going to give her a name that would sound well with any other, to my ears," was the fond husband's reply. "Now can you guess what it is?"

"How could I guess? I never heard you speak of any name."

"My preference for this one goes without saying. We will call her Mary Louisa."

A happy laugh was all that greeted this announcement, and the little mite of humanity was named and in due time christened Mary Louisa, Mary Grey acting as god-mother for her little namesake.

She was a week old now, and, the proud young mother

declared, was beginning to notice things. What if her love did furnish some of the wonders about the little form?—it was truth to her. Who would have the hardihood to dispel a parent's happy delusions about the wonders of a first-born babe?

But the little stranger was no less a wonder to the other two members of the little household. The father was almost womanly in his tender care for his little daughter, and would want to hold her by the hour, and cared only to peer into her innocent face. It was with reluctance that he tore himself away to go to his work, not caring to leave for a whole day the little home which contained so much happiness. Mary Grey entered fully into the pride, love, and joy of the parents over their babe, and the three vied with each other in lavishing care and affection upon her. The child had indeed been born into a happy world—happy as far as human love could insure.

After the mother had again regained her usual strength Mrs. Grey returned to her regular duties, but found time to go to see her little namesake twice a week. She was becoming so tenderly attached to the little thing that she would like to have kept it with her always. It grew and brightened so that even others besides the mother could see that she was beginning to "notice things." The smiles of her baby lips and the sound of her soft cooing were the sweetest sights and sounds to three loving hearts, and new delights and wonders were developing under their very eyes every day.

One day, as the holidays were approaching, an injured man was brought to the hospital. There had been a run away, and the occupant of the carriage had been thrown against the curbstone near the hospital gates. Dr. Enod, who had not been at the place much lately, owing to the demands of his practice, had just arrived in time to help

carry the insensible man into the building. He beckoned to Mrs. Grey.

"If you are equal to the task, we will attend to this man. His injuries must be internal," he went on, as he examined the unconscious man. "There seems to be no bones broken, and he only has a few bruises and slight cuts." These seemed to be mostly about the head and neck; his face had escaped, but was deathlike in its marble whiteness.

Mrs. Grey did not need a second look into the man's face to see who he was. It was Fred. Alton that lay before her in the stillness of death. His hair was plentifully sprinkled with gray, and his form had lost much of its healthful ruggedness, but she could not long mistake the face.

"He is an old acquaintance of mine, Dr. Enod," she said.

She was standing beside the cot, helping to bind his bruised head, when he opened his eyes, and as they fell full upon her a look of recognition lighted up his features. "Mrs. Grey," he said, faintly. Then he threw his hand to his head, saying, "Oh, my head!" but he quickly extended the other toward her, saying in a pleading tone: "Do not leave me. Promise that you will stay by me." Before he had hardly formed the last words of his entreaty he had again lost consciousness.

"If you so desire, I will see to it that you are allowed to nurse him, Mrs. Grey," said Dr. Enod. "Do you care to do so?"

"How could I do otherwise?" was her reply.

As heretofore, Mrs. Grey's wish had only to be made known to be granted. The doctor soon returned from the superintendent, saying: "You may consider him your charge."

Mrs. Grey hastily penned a few lines to Mrs. Tinly, telling her that she would not see her for some time. Then she wrote at greater length to Mrs. Ferris. She told her of the accident, but that she need have no fear; that she was to nurse the brother herself, and concluded by saying, "As long as you receive no telegram, rest assured that there is no danger."

Fred. Alton did not again regain consciousness for weeks. His injuries were concussion of the brain, which resulted in fever. He talked very little in his delirium. Mrs. Grey, who was seldom from his side, heard him speak her name and that of his wife. To the latter he used the old tender tones. He would say, as if in entreaty: "I have never given you cause for sorrow, have I, dear? I have always been kind to you, have I not?" and he would put out his hand as if to stroke her hair. At such times the listener's heart was touched. "I will take care of him for her sake."

Then he would speak of her and bemoan the fate that separated them. "She would not need to have run away from me as from a leper; I meant to marry her in the end. We would have been happy, and all would have been atoned for." At such times she would shrink from him. "All would have been atoned for," she said to herself. "Oh, how thankful I am that I am such a happy, care-free woman today!"

One day he was talking more than usual. Dr. Enod came into the room in time to hear him say: "If I had had a sturdy little body like Mrs. Grey to walk by my side, how different my journey through this life might have been."

The doctor looked up at Mrs. Grey quickly, but could see no confusion or embarrassment, only the deepest pity for the man before her. "Whatever might have been

between them, she has nothing to regret," was his mental conclusion. "Will you tell me some time?" he asked, turning a look of full confidence and trust upon her.

"I will tell you all there is to know now," was her answer. "He is the brother of Mrs. Ferris, the lady that I visited last spring; the one who gave me a home after the death of my husband. He is the gentleman who secured me the position to distribute the charity fund. After the death of his wife, he made me an offer of marriage, that is all."

"Only one more question. You did not accept him, did you?"

"No, I did not accept him."

But the man was still unsatisfied. "I am going to ask another question. Are you sorry? Would you accept him now?"

"No, I am not sorry that I did not accept him, nor would I do so now."

"Thank you," he said; "that is all that I wanted to know."

But one evening a few days later, he asked for her in the parlor. "You may go to Mrs. Grey's patient for a time," he said to one of the attendants. "She has been too closely confined to that room." Mary Grey came dutifully in answer to his summons. It was early in the evening, and the lamps had not yet been lighted.

"Thank you for coming," he said. He put out his hand, she placed her's into it with a rosy blush, which was visible even in the uncertain light.

"I told you the other day that you had answered all the questions that I cared to ask. I have many more to ask, but will be content with one just now—Mrs. Grey will you marry me? Answer as promptly as you did before, but answer Yes," he said, drawing her toward him, and winding his arm about her waist.

"Yes," she answered, without hesitation.

"Now I want to hear you say yes once more, then I will be satisfied. Do you love me?" The answer came "Yes" in the same decisive tone. His arm tightened about her waist and their lips met in a lover's kiss.

"I have many more things to say to you, but have no time to do so now. Would you like to take a drive this evening, down to see Mrs. Tinky? You have not been there for some time."

"Yes, I would be pleased to go," was her glad answer.

"Thank you," he said. "Now I must hurry and attend to my patients, or it will be too late to drive out." As he hurried away, he said: "Get your hat and shawl; I will be ready in just fifteen minutes."

"What a noble man," thought Mary Grey. "God is indeed good to me." She hurried to her patient's room. He was lying just as she had left him, and was still sleeping. The woman agreed readily to remain a few hours longer, saying: "A drive in the open air will do you good after so much confinement."

The man drove along a street, away from the glare and noise of the city. He drove slow so as to gain time for his story. It was a beautiful evening, clear and bright and warm as spring, although it was the middle of December. Here he told her how he had been interested in her from the first. He did not say much about this, not caring to recall the circumstances under which he met her. Then he told her how this interest soon grew into love, but that he did not care to tell her of it until there was some hope that his love was returned, and that he had felt safe to let things drift along while there was no one to come into the way.

"But I wanted to secure you before that handsome fellow at the hospital came to his senses. Forgive me,

little one," he continued, "but you know where there is love there is also a certain degree of jealousy. Now we will plan for the future. How many plans have you to propose? A number of them I will warrant."

"I would first like to remain at the hospital until Mr. Alton is better."

"But that would put our wedding off too long and I am impatient. It will take you several weeks to get ready. You will want some new frocks and gowns. I will want my little wife to look nice, because I know that finery will never harden her heart. See, my prophesy is soon to be fulfilled. You are to have all the money you want to carry on your good work; then you will be happy."

"How could I be otherwise?" was her happy answer. "I will go to Mrs. Tinly's to make what preparations are necessary. I will tell her this evening."

"Not this evening, dear. See, we are back to the hospital gates. We do not care to see any one only each other tonight. You can go and tell her in the morning. I only wanted to have you to myself for an hour. Remember," he said at parting, "that I am to see you as much as possible. I am so glad that I am rich, that I can gratify your every wish. All that you will have to do will be to follow your own inclinations and be happy, and in return be my own true, loving little wife."

When Mrs. Grey returned to her patient's room, she was met at the door by the nurse who told her that he was conscious. He had gained consciousness directly after she had gone from the room. The doctor had been there and pronounced the symptoms favorable, and that from now on everything depended upon nursing and quiet. "The moment he opened his eyes," continued the woman, "he made an attempt to look about the

room, as if in search of some one, but has as yet said nothing."

Mrs. Grey went quietly in and stood beside the bed. The man before her looked nearer death's door than he did during his delirium. The fever had left him almost powerless to move, and his eyes were closed as if in sleep. Mrs. Grey had hoped that she might enter without his noting the change, but in that frame that was hanging over the very jaws of death in its weakness, the senses seemed keenly on the alert, and soft as her movements were he noticed the stir. He opened his eyes, and in them she at once saw reason and recognition. He made as if to raise his hand, but the attempt scarcely produced a stir of the fingers.

Mary Grey laid her own plump hand, thrilling with life and health, upon his almost lifeless one. His lips moved as if to speak; she bowed her head, and he faintly whispered, "Mrs. Grey, I was afraid that you had left me." And for all this world contained the listener would not have denied him the happiness that brought that smile of perfect contentment to his lips, as he closed his eyes and lay as one dead.

The watcher by his side was afraid to remove her hand lest the movement should again disturb him, and she knew that his life was hanging in a balance, and that the added weight of a hair would make the side of life go down. She stood as if to infuse his cold hand with some of her own warmth, until he dropped into a refreshing sleep, then seated herself on a chair beside the bed.

The patient slept soundly all night, and the next morning seemed stronger. When his eyes opened they fell upon his nurse, and the same look of peaceful contentment came over his face, and from this time Mrs. Grey could not be lured from her post. Her lover demurred,

but she was firm. "My duty is by my patient until he is out of danger. You would not have me shirk my duty, would you?"

"No dear," was his answer, "at least not unless it kept you away from me. We middle-aged people have even less patience than the young in such matters, and it is a little hard to have to be satisfied with only a word now and then." But satisfied he had to be.

Fred. Alton continued to grow stronger, and in a week's time he was allowed to talk and sit up a few moments at a time. "It is only a few days until Christmas now," he said to Mrs. Grey one day. "Do you think that I will be strong enough to eat dinner with the rest of you then?"

"I hope so," was her answer, "and if you are not, I will come and eat with you. You shall not be left alone, rest assured."

"As kind and thoughtful as ever, little nurse," he said. He seemed more cheerful and impatient for Christmas to come. "I do not believe that I will be able to go down," he said to her several times, "and remember I hold you to your promise."

"I never make any promises that I am not willing to be held to," was her answer. "The only thing that causes me any uneasiness is, that I, as your nurse, will be held responsible for the amount that you eat, and I may not be able to manage you without some assistance."

"Without Dr. Enod, you mean. Only dispense with his company, and I will promise the strictest obedience," he answered pettishly. Mrs. Grey made him no reply and pretended not to hear.

True to her word, on Christmas day Mrs. Grey had a table set for two in Mr. Alton's room. It was as appetizing as care and good taste could make it. The signs of sickness had all been removed. The cot had been folded

and placed in a closet, and a large easy chair filled its place. A pot of blooming geraniums had taken the place of the medicine bottles on the stand, and a bouquet of cut flowers was placed upon the center of the table.

"I was not strong enough to go down to dinner, but I am going to talk as much as I please," said Fred. Alton in his old boyish fashion.

"Yes, if you do not please to talk too much. You must not weary yourself, and you know that you have promised strict obedience."

"I only promised to consult you as to the amount of turkey and mince pie that it would be prudent to eat. I did not even mention talking, and I might as well die from excitement as suspense. Mrs. Grey, do you think that I have no conscience? Do you think that it has caused me no remorse to lay here, the helpless recipient of your kindness and care, knowing that I had wronged you? In all my delirium I had not forgotten who bent over me when I regained consciousness on the day that I was hurt, because when I came to myself after the fever was over, I fully expected to see you. I think that it was your face that called me back to life. Answer me one question, did you do it all from a sense of duty alone, or have you forgiven me? It will do me less harm to answer me, here and now, than to have things to go on. I admit the wrong. I fell in love with you while my wife was yet alive. Oh, that we should be cursed with such weakness! But I never changed toward my wife, and she died believing me true. I knew all the time that she would only live a short time, and that all would come right in the end. Can you not forgive me the weakness that caused me to forget myself?"

Mrs. Grey hardly knew how to answer, but she saw the fever spots deepen in his hollow cheeks, and answer

she must. She knew that he could bear it better now than to be put off. Then she began in kindly tones: "I cared for you from a sense of duty, my duty toward a suffering human being and the brother of my best friend; but I have also forgiven you long ago."

"Yes," he said almost impatiently; "it is your nature to forgive, but can you give me what I would almost have forfeited my soul to win, your love? Will you marry me? I am wealthy and together we will devote our lives to good works, and by so doing I may be able to atone for my past. Will you not try to save me from myself?"

He had forgotten his dinner and was growing more feverish and excited every moment, and had dropped upon his knees beside her chair.

"Come," she said, gently taking him by the hand and compelling him to arise. She led him to a reclining chair. His strength was spent and he sank into it helplessly.

"Forgive me," she said, "if I cause you pain," and she placed her hand over his, "but you are a man and can bear it now. I forgive you fully and freely for all the wrong that you have ever done me, but I do not love you and can never marry you."

"But you may learn to love me. I do not ask it now; in a year or two years; only give me time to prove myself worthy of your love."

"No," she said, tightening her hand over his, "I would not marry you even if I was not promised to another. You may not be willing to admit this, you may not even know it yourself, but I know that if I had yielded through love for you, or been tempted by your wealth, you would long since have neglected me for another, and it would have been just that you should; but God has given us no

less a right to demand of a husband a blameless character. The ten commandments, given by God, were intended for all alike, and at the gates of heaven the question will not arise whether the wrong doer be man or woman."

"But I thought that you believed in a merciful and forgiving God," said the man, clutching like a drowning man to a straw.

"So I do, but he only forgives those who prove themselves worthy of forgiveness, and we have no right to countenance by our conduct what will bar men out of heaven; and not only that, if women, the beings to whom God has given that sacred trust—the motherhood of future generations—were as exacting as men in their choice of companions, the result could not fail to speak in tones of thanksgiving and praise through the health and morals of the whole human race. I do not say this as a dispenser of justice, but only as one woman speaking to one man the sentiments of her heart."

"Mrs. Grey, I know better than any one, except God, that I am not worthy of you, although the worst of us demand a blameless character as our right. My punishment is just, but I can not bow to it since it denies me my heart's greatest desire."

"Forgive me if I have caused you pain," she said, placing her hand for a moment over his mouth. "I forbid you to talk any more now, but remember that I am your friend. If you wish it, and promise never to speak to me on this subject again, I will still be your nurse."

"I do wish it," he said, taking her hand from his mouth and holding it a moment, then raising it to his lips. "I would make you any promise to keep you here." Then he said, as if to himself, "Thank God for one gentle, kind-hearted woman, even though she be not for me." He bore his punishment well, only once again did he refer to the forbidden subject.

"Mrs. Grey," he said to her one day, "may I ask you one more question?" He had been feverish and weak and threatened with a return of the fever in all its violence, and his nurse was if possible more kind and gentle than ever.

"More than one," she said, "if they are such as I can answer."

"I just want to ask one," he said. "Is Dr. Enod the man that you are engaged to?"

"Yes," she said in her straightforward way.

"I thank you for your candor; I would a little rather he had you than some one else," but she raised a warning finger. The man smiled faintly and was silent. He began to mend anew and it was hoped that he would be able to leave the hospital by the middle of January. The doctor was delighted, because now he was granted more of the society of his promised bride. But the patient was still exacting and declared that since he was not an object of charity, but willing to pay any price for his care, he had a right to the best nurse that the house afforded, and as much of her time as he might choose.

Mary Grey, with nothing but pity at her heart, humored the sick man's whims and was untiring in her attentions.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE CONCLUSION.

THERE was a wedding in the hospital parlors, on the evening of the 18th of January. The doctor had grown impatient of delay, and as he said, had taken matters into his own hands, but any one who was familiar with his movements knew that things had been in his hands ever since the evening when Mrs. Grey had made him the happiest of men with her simple yes.

He had been busy from morning until night, overseeing certain proceedings in a stately residence on a quiet street, where he had been in constant demand by either the upholsterer, paper hanger or carpet men. And accompanied by a young lady cousin, he made numerous mysterious excursions from the stores to the dressmakers. This he was called upon so often to do, that the man began to wonder how women had enough head left to take care of themselves without a guide, after they had once made their toilet.

Mrs. Tingly had also been taken into confidence, and had lent valuable aid in the way of measures and sizes. So industrious had they been that the preparations were all completed several days before the appointed time. Mrs. Grey was not let into the secret until the eleventh hour.

On the morning of the 18th Doctor Knod asked her to accompany him on a tour of inspection, as he called it. She had gone with him, little dreaming what she was to inspect. He took her straight to the home he had been preparing for her, and led her from one to the other of the spacious and elegantly furnished rooms. After she

had been through all with the exception of her own dressing room, he turned to her and said: "This is your home, darling, how do you like it?"

"And who has been doing all this beautiful work for me," she said, throwing her arms for the first time about his neck.

"People who ask no other return, only that you will like it and be happy."

"How could I be otherwise? You are certainly the best of men. And you did it all for me?"

"I did it all for you. But you know that pleasing you insures my own happiness. Now if you are pleased with the house, I will show you something else." So with his arm about her waist he led her into the next room.

Here she found such an outfit as only love and care could have planned; not one of gay colors and senseless display, but such a one as would please any womanly woman's heart. Everything was of the best texture. Down to the minutest detail nothing had been forgotten.

"Do these things please you, pet?"

"I can hardly believe that all these things have been done for me. Am I worthy of all this kindness and care?" said the happy woman, smiling through her tears.

"Yes; this much, and many times more. I intend to spend my whole life in proving how much you are worth to me. But I am a man, and consequently a selfish animal, and now I am going to demand my price, and that is that you consent to our being married this evening. Will you accept my terms?"

She began as if to raise objections, but he placed his hand over her mouth. "It was because I was afraid of those objections that I have done all this without your knowledge. But now everything is in readiness, and you would not deny me, I know. We will be married

in the hospital parlor, then come directly home. My cousin, who has helped to plan this wardrobe, will come and help make what further arrangements may be necessary. I have even gone so far as to procure the license and engage the minister, but I know that you will forgive me."

"There is nothing to forgive; you are too kind to me. There is only one thing that I regret, I wish that we could have waited until Mr. Alton was gone."

"If he is bound to linger I am not to blame. I gave him plenty of time to get away. I think it is because he is a little overfond of being nursed that he does not grow strong faster. It will be good enough for him. If he is a man let him prove himself. You would not disappoint me on his account, would you?"

"No, I would not disappoint you; but he has suffered much, and I would have spared him this."

"You are a tender-hearted little woman, and I only hope that I can prove myself worthy of you. Tonight it shall be then. Thank you, darling."

"If it is to be so soon, I can not even remain longer to be praised and petted," she said looking at him archly.

He released her reluctantly. "Since it is to be so soon I ought to be willing to let you go. We ordered this white for you to be married in. I will have it sent to you in good time," said the man, as they left the room. "Your friend, Mrs. Tingly, has rendered valuable aid to us," he said to her on the way home. "She and her husband and little Mary are coming to see us married. I have ordered a carriage to bring them. I thought that you would want them there."

"I am so glad that you have not forgotten them. But how will I ever thank you for your kindness?"

"By being happy," was the reply.

When Mrs. Grey returned to her patient's room, she found that he was ready to leave. One of the chambermaids had just heard the news that there was to be a wedding in the parlor. She was so exercised over the anticipated affair when she went to arrange his room that she began to talk of it at once, and before Mrs. Grey knew of it herself, Fred. Alton had heard the whole story, how the wealthy and handsome Doctor Enod was going to marry Mrs. Grey, the best and kindest nurse in the whole place.

He had listened without a word, but as soon as the girl was gone he packed his valise. That was all that he had in the carriage with him at the time of the accident. He then sat down to wait. He wanted to see the face of his nurse once more, and bid her good-bye, if some one else was going to claim her that very evening.

Mrs. Grey could not conceal her happy smile, but she stopped short when her eyes fell upon the man's valise and hat. Her own happiness convicted her, and she said hastily, "Why, Mr. Alton, are you sure that you are able to leave?"

"Strong enough," was his curt reply, "and since I am about to lose my nurse, there is no longer any inducement to be sick. I wanted to say good-bye before I go. I can not bear to see you married. Good-bye, Mrs. Grey, God bless you. Think of me kindly sometimes when you are in your happy home." He had caught her by both hands, and kissed first one then the other. "Now I am going to ask one boon of you, and if you love, or have any mercy for my unworthy soul, you will not refuse it. It is not much, only that you kiss me once before I go. You will be no less a woman, and it may help to make a man of me. Thank you," he said, as her lips were raised to his forehead, which he had bared, and

the next moment he was gone, and the heartfelt sympathy of Mary Grey went with him. Her happiness softened her toward the whole human family.

She went from one to the other of the patients, and talked to and petted them until they forgot their pain. She wrote a letter to Mrs. Ferris, telling her of her approaching marriage. "Tell all my friends that I send them the news through you." Her happiness did not cause her to forget her first love, and if such a thing were possible her thoughts of him were more tender than ever. The memory of him who was the source of her youthful joys and early sorrows, so softened her heart that great tears rolled down her cheeks, but not tears of remorse. "You are happy in heaven, Robert, you do not need me now," she thought.

After the tears of emotion were spent, the sunshine of peace flooded her heart, caused not alone by her present joy, but also by the memories of a happy past, memories which nothing on earth would have the power to blot out.

That evening promptly at seven, the ceremony was performed which made Mrs. Grey and Doctor Enod man and wife. It was witnessed by the superintendent's family, the nurses, attendants, convalescents, and Mr. and Mrs. Tinky. The sailor, who had hobbled in on his crutches, gave the bride away, although he declared that he would much rather have had her himself.

Surely the little assembly had never seen a couple so well suited to each other, a more beautiful bride, or handsomer groom. Not alone the beauty that fadeth away, but the lofty expression which comes from good resolves and noble aims. And good wishes were never more heartfelt than were those which were showered upon the happy pair.

After the ceremony Mr. and Mrs. Enod went directly

to their home, but not before the bride had taken time to fondle the baby Mary, nor before the proud mother had been given time to draw attention to some wonderful accomplishments which the little tot had by this time mastered, which were duly praised.

Then Mrs. Enod went from under the roof which was to know her no more as a nurse, but it was to know her ever after as a kind friend and benefactor. And many were the delicacies that were not merely sent there, but administered to the patients by her own kind hands, and made doubly tempting by her winning smile.

There never was a happier or more tender bride than graced the home of Doctor Enod, and there never was a pair bound together by stronger affections; not the fitful, feverish and sometimes capricious love of youth, but the attachment of mature years, broad and deep, which would ever gain strength in new found worth in its object.

Together they set about doing what was nearest their hearts. Mrs. Enod never forgot her old, sly way of doing good, in a manner that made the recipient of her bounty feel as if they themselves were responsible for the good which they received. Little Mary Tinly she clothed, claiming that as the right of a godmother, and when there was quite a little group, by the addition of another little girl, and then a little son, her right was even extended to them. Through the influence of the doctor the young mechanic secured a position, which was better pay and not so dangerous to life and limb, and he was established as shipping clerk in one of the large wholesale houses. Soon their cottage was left for a more spacious house, to make room for the growing family. As the children grew up they received the education which circumstances had denied to the mother and father, and aside from the doctor and his wife there was not a happier family in all the east.

Mrs. Enod still kept up her correspondence with Mrs. Ferris, and a few years after her marriage she with her husband accepted an invitation to make a visit to Cloverdale. With the exception of a few births, marriages and deaths, the place was just as Mrs. Grey had left it. The only difference was that most of the people kept at a respectful distance. They stood just a little in awe of the dignified doctor, and also of his wife, for having come into such wonderful good fortune.

Colonel Wilkins was still single, she was told. He had been so devoted to his wife, and did not believe in second marriages. The boys had grown up to be young men and were away at college, and Aunt Minnie and her brother were alone in their country home.

Mrs. Jones and Mrs. Dixon, and other kindred spirits, were still employing themselves in heralding coming events, and adding to their interest as they transpired.

Whether Miss Green was most to be pitied or blamed, was not known, but no one had as yet cared to extricate her from the uncertain joys of single blessedness. She and Tommy had not yet buried the hatchet, as he had once expressed it; and since the victory is not to the strong but to the persistent, and neither of them was deficient in that virtue, it might, to use another of Tommy's sayings, take many more eveners to bring things to a satisfactory termination.

Deacon Hill and his wife were still taking life easy, the deacon doing the talking and Betsey doing the listening. Their daughter Bessie was soon to marry Squire Whitby's son. This was a source of great sorrow to the fond parents' hearts. Their one birdling was soon to leave the home nest.

From Mrs. Ferris, Mrs. Enod learned that Fred. Alton had drifted about, here and there for a time, and had just

recently married the widow Enod. After the doctor's marriage he had never heard from his sister-in-law, and this was news to him, but he was not surprised to hear that a few things had been learned that made it appear as if the union would not be a happy one. "They say that she is already furiously jealous of him, and that alone is cause enough for unhappiness," concluded Mrs. Ferris. "I feel sorry for Fred., he is a good-hearted boy," said the sister.

Busy people can not indulge in long visits, and the doctor's practice soon called him home, at least so he claimed. But the secret of the matter was, that since he had been so long in finding a home it was all the sweeter to him now, and he was never satisfied away from it.

So those two returned to the home where peace and contentment reigned. The woman in whose heart her own experience had only strengthened the spirit of charity and mercy for even the basest of earth's creatures to the life which she had so long planned for herself. Her noble husband to be her aid and abettor. Providence had intrusted them with wealth and influence and the trust had not been misplaced; they bore it modestly and exercised it to God's own purpose. They helped to feed the hungry and clothe the poor. They not only pointed out the right course to the wandering wayfarer, but took them by the hand and endeavored to lead them back to the paths of rectitude.

The blessing of having children of their own was denied them and the hearts of both were sometimes filled with longing. "But God knows all things best," said Mrs. Enod to her husband. "If we had children of our own we might grow selfish and forget the many helpless little things which we are permitted to keep from starvation and want."

"Yes," was his fond reply, "if my wife had children of her own to care for, she could not be the little mother to the many, both high and low, black and white, that come in for an equal share of her affections. But I do not care how many she loves, as long as she keeps a good share of her tender heart for me."

"I have never given you cause for complaint, have I dear?" she said, stealing her arm through his and laying her head against his shoulder.

"No, thank God for such a wife. The more that bring in a claim for her attention, the more loving her heart becomes toward her husband." He drew her closer to his side and so we leave them.

THE END.

